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ABSTRACT

This package is intended to assist tutors who are working to improve their adult students' writing skills. It is divided into three parts. The first part, which focuses on the process of writing, includes 13 units in which tutors can explore writing work, either with small groups or individual students. The units, each of which includes transcripts from tapes and a discussion point, deal with the following aspects of the writing process: going from talk to writing, warming up, catching words, reading back, making suggestions to help others rewrite, rewriting one's own work, planning, choosing, recognizing that there are different types of English, writing together, writing for different purposes, writing for other people, and reviewing different types of writing achievements. The second part of the pack contains two longer discussions. The first raises some issues about language and learning, and the second deals with the special role of the tutor in a group of people who are working at improving their writing. The third part, which is called "Themes and Beginnings," contains suggestions for using personal incidents, feelings, learning experiences, and escapes and changes as bases for developing written work and includes a section on the importance of focus to good writing. The final part deals with other forms of expression--photography, tape-slide presentations, and video; reviews the theory behind the pack; and includes a list of further readings and contacts. (MN)

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IDEAS ABOUT WRITING FOR ADULT STUDENTS £3.70

CONVERSATIONS WITH STRANGERS

Sue Shrapnel Gardener

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CONVERSATIONS WITH STRANGERS

IDEAS ABOUT WRITING FOR ADULT STUDENTS

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FOR THE GRANDMOTHERS

I don't know her
but I know she's listening
in a hard elbow chair
fingers tapping its arm
never learned to rest

What you been doing then, gal?

Writing this stuff, Nan.
Don't know what you'll think of it.

What's it about?

Floods, wash tubs, mothers, ghosts,
unemployment and the smell of paint —
anything people talk about.
It's about words.
Getting them down on paper

That.
Like your mother.
She was one for book-learning.

Not just their books, Nan.
Pulling out into books
our truths that no-one heard
only the big-eyed dog
or the fire in the pub
or the sheets on the ironing table.
Only the child on the stairs.

Never had no children, did you?

Never did. Only books.

Words never put no dinner on the table
Don't know, though.
Must have put yours there.
Not a bad dinner at that.

Words did, Nan.
They talked the money out of the pay packet
into your hand —
talked it in there in the first place,
through the union, and the law
if you're lucky
Talked many women out of a beating,
talked children asleep,
rigged up a makeshift of dreams for them,
made do and mended
when the dreams fell apart.
made jokes, made sense,
made the irony
you use against me now.
Your words, Nan.
Where else did I get them from?

Well, you carry on, gal.
I suppose you know what you want.

Suppose so, Nan.
Will you have a look at it
when it's finished?

Maybe I will.
Got time for that now.

Sue Gardener
18.3.85

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1 WHAT IS THIS?

This pack is addressed to students and tutors in adult education who are working at writing.

The title has three meanings for me. It reflects my experience doing the work which produced the pack: I was travelling round the country, walking into strange rooms and falling into conversations, often close and revealing ones, with people I had not met before. It reflects your experience reading the pack: you will encounter, through tape transcripts and photos and through what they have written, a lot of people whom you will not meet in any other way. And it says something about writing itself: when your words are down on paper, they are outside the setting of your face-to-face conversations, and they take you into conversation with people you may never meet at all.

To make it clear from the start:'writing' here means making up something that will be set down on paper. It does not necessarily mean that the person who makes it up will also write it down. Writing work can go on from the early days of literacy work, and composing through talk can go on into many 'advanced' and complicated projects. It seems likely that some of the same problems recur, and some of the same processes will be useful, over a long period of an adult student's development as a writer. There are ideas here that may be of use to school and FE college students too.

It is not a series of lesson plans, but it is written to be read, in parts or as a whole, to, by and with students in classes. It is also written to be acted on. I know some of it is hard, and some of it is long. I don't think any of it should be beyond the understanding of someone who wants to understand.

ORIGINS

The ideas come out of a long time working with adult students. More exactly, they come out of the ten years' life of a group called *Write First Time*. *Write First Time* published a paper three times a year, which printed writing by students in adult basic education classes from anywhere in the country, including the prisons. The group has also used the paper, and meetings and conferences, to train, support and encourage some active uses of students' developing skill in literacy. They have made links with other groups developing and publishing working-class people's writing, through the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers.

Sadly, as this work is being prepared for the printers, *Write First Time* is coming to the end of its life, at least in its present form, since no further grant aid will be paid by ALBSU, on which it has relied till now, for publishing the paper. The early history of this work of publishing students' writing was reported by me in an article in *Adult Education* in 1979, and a list of books published by literacy centres is still available from the *Write First Time* office.

In 1981, *Write First Time* appointed me as their Writing Development Worker. This job took me to Kent, Norfolk, Lancashire, Sussex, and West and South Yorkshire, working with students and tutors in their classes, to develop their writing. We had not planned to turn this experience into classroom material during the time of the Writing Development Project, but the Department of Education and Science made it a condition of the second part of our grant that we should do so. I have, of course, learned from doing it: I will learn more from other people's criticism and use of what I have done.

2 THE APPROACH TO WRITING

People don't always mean the same things when they talk about writing, particularly in basic education. Some people mean handwriting. Others mean spelling, punctuation, and some work on style and organization, and often expect it to be something you do later, when you have got on with reading. Others think they, or their students, may never do it at all, or don't need to. And others have given it such importance that they put a lot of work into polishing and publishing work with students. I wish there was more room to set out the understanding of how writing develops, on which I base the work I do. Working at the theory is the next job to be done. But I'll try to outline here what my starting points are.

You can write from the start of your study. If you can't write on your own: decide what you want to say; tell it to someone else to write down (or tape it); read it as best you can; copy it if you want to.

You'll be making things to read as well as taking them in. You will also bring into the classroom one of your most important resources: your skill at talking.

There's more to writing than spelling. If we write from the start, we're working at the first process of writing — making it up. If you've made nothing up, you've nothing to set down. And yet a lot of our work on writing, and our worry about writing, concentrates on the 'setting down' end. (One writer calls these two processes composition and transcription.)

If you only look at the work that goes into spelling, punctuation, proof reading and the likes of that, you can miss two things about composition. The first is that you can do it: you do it all the time as you talk. The second is that it takes work. We know roughly what we want to say, but it needs concentration and sorting out. The more we worry about setting it down, the less energy we have for making it up. Don't let correctness get in the way of meaning.

Of course correctness matters: if I haven't set out a lot of ideas for working at that, it's because there is more advice on offer, and we are more used to setting those problems to ourselves.

Everything you write is a draft. School experience often leaves us thinking we have only one try at writing: we got marked on the first version we handed in. So some inexperienced writers come to think that you can either do it or you can't. They don't see the experiments and half-way stages: they think that for experienced writers, the words sort themselves out in your brain, and all you have to do is let them out, one by one — like a print-out from a computer. This isn't so. Experienced writers write to find out what they are trying to say.

Experienced and inexperienced writers try things out in their heads, by talking, sometimes by listening to themselves (on a tape) or by listening to how other people react. What you learn from experience is when to start writing, so you've got a draft to look at instead of just ideas buzzing round your head (or slipping through your fingers).

When you've got a draft, you can find out where it's going, and help it to get there. You can change it and have second thoughts. It may be all right the first time: but treat it as a draft till you're sure. Drafts aren't mistakes: they are work in progress.

Writing is communication. Of course; but that may not be clear if the aim of writing seems to be 'to show you my mistakes', and if writing exercises stay in the file or go into the bin. Writers need readers: the tutor may be the first reader, but there should be others. That is one reason for the emphasis you will find here on group work, just as it is a reason for the whole history of *Write First Time* and the other forms of publishing and sharing students' work. It is by getting feedback from readers that a writer learns if she has communicated what she meant to, and takes the key step of becoming her own reader.

Writing can be sociable. We get stuck with the idea that the writer works on her own, with nothing to go on but inspiration. A lot more writing is done by hard work, and shared work. We owe it to inexperienced writers to make this clear to them, and to offer them the kinds of help and support that we have whenever we take on a hard writing job. Tutor and student can share some of the work; so can student and students. Working together isn't cheating.

Writing and the real world. Some people react to *Write First Time*, and to the work I do, by calling it 'creative' writing. I don't like the label. It seems to put writing in a place that is at the same time special and useless. So we may think that it won't be suitable for all students, only more 'advanced' or 'gifted' ones; and that there are other, more practical, kinds of writing on which we might more usefully spend our time. After all, it's application forms that get you jobs, not childhood memories, ghost stories or discussions of the roles of women — isn't it?

If we need labels, I find more use in the division of writing into expressive, poetic and transactional (writing to make things happen): see 'Further reading'. This theory suggests we need a firm grip on the expressive before we tackle the other uses of writing. Does our teaching experience confirm this? Has anyone found a route to impersonal communication that doesn't go first through more personal messages?

The main thing inexperienced writers lack is experience, of trying to write for different purposes and different people, and of getting feedback, and finding useful ways of describing what's going right and what's going wrong, and trying something new, and reading alongside their writing with an eye to how other writers have done it. The transcripts and written work printed here are evidence that adult students can carry out these processes. Tutors can usefully test my assumptions by extending their own writing experience too.

Whose English? I said at the beginning that *Write First Time* printed writing from all over the country, and that's true; but in practice, most of it came from England, with a few Irish voices. (One issue was made in the Republic of Ireland.) But of course, Welsh and Scottish people live in this country too; and so do people from the Caribbean, Cyprus, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, many African countries.... The English that is spoken in our classes is not one English but many. I have tried to recognize that as I have chosen the examples for you to read, and I have also tried in two or three places to discuss what the fact that there are different forms of English means for us as people teaching and learning. I believe we must do two things with this variety of language: accept it, and understand it. If it still seems that the language of the English majority takes up most of the pack, then we must do more work later to see that everyone's English is read and respected.

3 USING THE PACK

THE PARTS

Part A is called 'The process of writing'. It follows through some of the activities that can go on in a group, or between tutor and student, in exploring writing work. It is not an order of events that you follow through, once, from 1 to 13: these processes go on all the time.

I have deliberately chosen among them some examples of work with beginner writers, so that everyone can be encouraged to try. It's a chance to look at events that have really happened, and think how they might apply to your work or your students' work. They aren't meant to be the best, or 'how to do it'—just lively starting points. There are discussion points at the end of each one: take them or leave them, look at as many or as few as you want.

They are short enough to read together. They include transcripts from tape recordings. These aren't always easy to read if you aren't used to them. Talk isn't like written language in every way. I've taken out the most awkward of the 'ums' and repeats and unfinished sentences. It may come easier if you read them aloud like a play, one part each.

Part B is two longer discussions. In the first section I raise some issues about language and learning that you can talk about together. It's very brief and you will need to look elsewhere for more information. The second section is about the special role of the tutor with a group of people working at writing.

Part C is called 'Themes and beginnings'. Most of it isn't what people call 'stimulus' for writing, if that means something you can bring in at 7 pm on Tuesday to get people writing by 7.30. (Though the last section, 'Focus', is a bit like that.) It's a longer look round some subjects for writing, and round the idea of imaginative writing. I've chosen the subjects because they turn up a lot in the work of inexperienced writers. In each case, I've suggested how writing can develop from the short personal accounts of life and opinions that most people start with.

Part D is some extras: other forms of expression — photography, tape-slide, video; a poster about the writer's progress; a review of the theory behind the pack; and a reading list, section by section, with general reading as well.

THE EXAMPLES

Parts A and C are full of examples. They vary a lot. Some are the work of adult students, both beginners and more practised learners; some are published work by other non-professional writers, many of them from writers' groups all over the country; and there are a few pieces by writers with well-known names. Again, they aren't necessarily chosen as 'the best', though I haven't used anything I think is downright bad. We do learn from the best, but we can also be silenced by it. I hope there is a variety of writing here from which we can learn to share ways of describing what is happening in a piece of writing. It should help us make suggestions to ourselves about our own work.

A piece of writing that only has an author's name is student work. If it was published in *Write First Time*, I've said which number it came out in.

For other work that has been published before, I've given the book title. Full details are in 'Further reading'.

If it's work by someone else, it's printed in this kind of type. It may be writing or taped talk.

If it looks like this, it's comment or notes or suggestions by me.

THE MAPS

The longer sections have 'maps' at the beginning. They seemed more use than a list of contents to show you the plan of the section and how the parts fitted together. They are also examples of a dodge I find useful for planning and thinking, and other people may pick it up.

The map of the whole pack is too big to manage. I have had to fall back on an ordinary contents list. You may find it useful to keep it by you as you read, to see how the parts fit together.

THE PHOTOS

These need a special note. Many of them were taken on a special commission in Sheffield and in Calderdale during 1984. They are photos of students in adult classes, studying, at work, at home and at leisure. Everyone in the photos agreed to be photographed and to have her or his picture used. I'm delighted that the old feeling that students had to hide themselves away to learn is going, and that a new feeling — 'anything I can do that will help other people' — is there instead. We would not have been able to do this, though, without the sensitive behaviour as well as the skill of the two photographers, Sally Greenhill and Michael Ann Mullen, and I thank them. Thanks also to other photographers whose work we use. I hope it shows you some of what the words can't tell you.

THANKS

Thanks must go first and foremost to the students and tutors whose work is quoted here, and those who might have been quoted but aren't. Large numbers of people have allowed me to come into their precious learning time, carry out experiments, ask silly questions, move the furniture, invite guests in, tape record them, and generally disturb their lives. Large numbers of people found themselves giving me bed and breakfast as well. I hope they got something out of it, and that they get more out of the pack, which is the best I can do for now in understanding and making available to other people what it is that we were learning together.

Secondly, thanks to all the writers of all kinds whose work I have used in whole or in part. We have tried to ask everyone if we may use their work or re-use it in this way. The only time we have allowed ourselves to use it if we couldn't get permission is if it has been published before in *Write First Time* and if we couldn't get in touch with the writers again. We have had to take the permission the writers gave then as being good for now as well, and we are very sorry if anyone minds.

Thanks to other individuals are on page 2 of this section. But I have to thank here my management group for the project, a committee of *Write First Time* collective. They have steered the project for three years, fed in ideas and experience to this work, read drafts, tried things out, done dogsbody jobs and tried to make it make sense, and without them there would be nothing here. If there is only one name on the cover, it's because I have been paid to write it; but I have been the mouthpiece, however inaccurate and clumsy, for ideas that have grown in wider company. I wish I could have written more about that because it would have made many things clear about how large scale writing jobs get done.

SHE

You may notice that when I talk in a general way about a tutor or a student, I say, 'She'. The convention used to be that 'He' included both men and women. Then we tried 'S/he', which is fine, but 'her/him' isn't so good over a long piece of work. So I settled for 'She' and 'her'. Sorry if it annoys you: many women have been annoyed for a long time by the other way of doing it.

Sue Shrapnel Gardener
January 1985

FROM TALK TO WRITING

Margaret and I had only met four times when we did this work. So I didn't know her very well, and I had a lot of questions to ask.

Margaret missed most of her schooling in the 1920s and 1930s because of a childhood illness, which also lost her some of the use of her left hand. In spite of that, she has done housework all her life, first for her big family of brothers and sisters, then for her elderly parents, and now just for herself. She said,

'Everything's easy now, en't it? There were no television, there were nowt then. We used to have to scrub floor, and donkey-stone steps, and there used to be them old fire-places – you know black-leaded.'

She has lived all her life in Stocksbridge, a steel town just outside Sheffield. I met her on Thursday mornings, in one of the huts at Stocksbridge College, where her class meets. She can't write much on her own, but I wanted to help her get down something about her life. So we worked in a way many of you will know: she talked, and I wrote it down.

We talked for a while about her family, and the houses they lived in, and then we settled on wash day as the thing to write about. This is part of the talk as we worked it out. The words in *italic* are what I wrote down.

Sue: Let's see if we can start with – well, let's make it your old house. You can't think of a particular wash day?
Margaret: No, well, it depended on t'weather like.
Sue: All right, that's a good start. *It used to depend on the weather.* (Let's call it *Wash day.*) Try and follow it line by line as I write it, and then we'll remember what you've said, and we can read on to the next bit. OK. It used to depend on the weather. Right, we'd better say why – it's obvious in a way. If it was wet, what did you do?
Margaret: We used to have to put lines inside – we used to put lines up in t'house.
Sue: Right; we may have to put this later on. *If it was dry* – let's do if it was dry first.
Margaret: If it was dry they went outside.
Sue: *They went outside, if it was wet* (this is a good easy bit for reading) – *if it was wet* – you put lines up in the kitchen?
Margaret: In the kitchen – well, kitchen, it don't matter, it were all in one, like.
Sue: What did you call it then?
Margaret: Kitchen – well, we did everything in it, like.
Sue: *We put lines in the kitchen.* OK. I think this is going to have to shunt to later on. Let's get back to that set pot you told me about, and getting that hot, right? So what was the first thing you had to do?
Margaret: Oh, we'd to light fire to heat t'water, you see.
Sue: Right. *First we had to light the fire to heat the water*; then what? Then you had to fill up the set pot? Was it so big that one person couldn't carry it?
Margaret: You couldn't carry it – it just used to be – you know the old sink, the pot sink, it used to be at the side of that, you see.
Sue: Right, so you'd lift it up on to the sink–

Margaret: No; we used to get t'water out with summat like a ladle, a ladle can or summat.
Sue: Oh, just bale it out.
Margaret: Yes; you couldn't lift it, no.
Sue: Right. *Then we had to fill the set pot*. What should I say? We had to ladle the water out of the sink with a–?
Margaret: A ladle can or summat, I don't know.
Sue: What would you call it, was it a special thing, or just a jug?
Margaret: Aye, a jug or something, put jug.
Sue: Just put jug, it's an easy one to remember.
Margaret: It's hard to go back all them years, isn't it?
Sue: Yes. Notice the words while I write, 'cause that's a tricky one. *We had to ladle the water out from the sink with a jug*, and – right. I'll go over it. 'First we had to light the fire to heat the water, then we had to fill the set pot. We had to ladle the water out of the sink with a jug.' What then? Wait till the water got to the boil?
Margaret: Yes, yes. We used to put it in t'tub–
Sue: Ah, so then you had to ladle it back again into the–
Margaret: Get it out with a bucket and put it in t'tub, you see–
Sue: Let me just talk before I start writing, I need to get this right. It's in the set pot, it's on the fire, it's come to the boil and you're actually going to wash in what, a wooden tub, or a tin tub?

Margaret: Tin tub.
Sue: A tin tub, right, so you're going to get the boiling water out of the set pot into the tub, and you do that with buckets?
Margaret: Yes. It's getting confusing, isn't it?
Sue: It just shows what hard work it was, doesn't it? Come on, let's get this organized. *When it came to the boil*, we – what would you call it, change it over into the tub? When it came to the boil – tell me what you did.
Margaret: We had to ladle it out with a – put the water in a bucket and teem it into your tub.
Sue: Teem it, you say.

Margaret: Well, you know, teem it in! (Laugh)
Sue: All right, I'm just listening. *We had to* – let's have 'ladle' again, because we've used that once, so we'll remember it. *Ladle it out with a bucket*, this time, will that do? I'll have to learn this word 'teem' – *and teem it into the tub*. Yes? Right. What then, put your soap powder in –
Margaret: Put soap powder in, bring it boiling and then put the posher in, posh it round and put the rubber in! (Laugh) Oh dear. It were hard work then. And we used to have a right old big mangle –
Sue: Hold your thought about the mangle, I want to get this bit down first. *Put the soap powder in, put the posher in and posh it round for a bit*, you said, *then we used to rub it*. They must have worn out quickly with all that rubbing, mustn't they?
Margaret: Oh aye; oh, it were hard work then. You can put them in the machine now, can't you, no trouble at all is it? You can do other jobs while that's doing, can't you? You couldn't then.
Sue: No, I know, it was really full time, wasn't it? *Oh, it were hard work then*. You'll never remember all this; let's try and read a bit of it back. Let's try and start here. First – what did we say?

We talked some more after that, wrote some more down, and then decided where each bit of information should go. This is what we had as the finished piece at the end of the morning: I've broken it into short lines for easy reading.

WASH DAY IN THE 1930s

First we had to light the fire
to heat the water.
Then we had to fill the set pot.
We had to ladle the water out from the sink
with a jug.
When it came to the boil,
we had to ladle it out with a bucket
and teem it into the tub.
Put the soap powder in,
put the rubbing board in,
put the posher in and posh it round for a bit,
then we used to rub it on the board.
Oh, it were hard work then.

Then we took it out
and rinsed it in a bowl
in cold water,
and emptied us tub
and started fresh.
We did about two rinses.
We had to wring them out by hand
and put them through the mangle,
and then they'd go on the line.
It used to depend on the weather.
If it was dry, they went outside.
If it was wet, we put up lines in the kitchen.

We used to boil us whites
in the set pot
and rinse them in dolly blue.
And the pinnies and the linens
we would use starch
and pin them straight out.
Working clothes were the worst.
They took longer to dry.
In winter they could take all week to dry.
Dry them and iron them.
We had flat-irons then.
We used to put them on the fire.
When one got hot,
we used to take it off and put another one on.

Nowt to it now, is there?

GETTING IT DOWN

* We took our time to work round to this subject. You don't always know exactly what you want to talk about. Was it a good subject? Why?

* There is a lot of going to and fro as we talk. I try to make it clear to Margaret which words I'm writing down, but it may not always be clear. So we stop from time to time and go over it. You might decide not to write so much the first time.

* I wrote exactly what Margaret said, as nearly as I could. I do this because – it's her story, what she knows in her words – it's easier to read back.
Are there any reasons for not writing it down word for word?

WHAT TO DO WITH IT

* Margaret read it back to me, first in bits and then all through. It's good to read what you have written, because:
– it's yours, you own it
– it's an achievement, you made it. Everyone works better if they feel good.
– You can make good guesses when you aren't sure of the word, because you know what comes next. The story in your head is the same as the story on the page.

* Margaret took a typed copy away. She could re-read it, or copy it out later. Copying makes sense if you know what the words are.

* It can lead to some more writing or reading. For example. Martha's and Winny's writing in *Our lives: working women*

* It can be shared with others in the group. It may get them started.

ENJOYMENT

* We laughed a lot, as you can see from the photos. Lessons don't have to be serious all the time.

* We brought the real world into the classroom: you might want to go out of the classroom again to go further. Trips to the local museum – do they have a posher and a set pot? How much do they sell for in the local antique shops? Are there any of the old style houses left?

WORDS

* Set pot, posher, rubbing board, ladle, mangle, flat-iron, donkey-stone . . . . All technical words for women's work; some of them are special to Yorkshire.
Were there local words for any of these things where you grew up?

* Margaret used one particular word that I had to ask about:' . . . and *teem* it into the tub'. Elaine, her tutor, said it's a word from steel making: you teem the hot metal out. My dictionary says it's 'dialect or technical'. I reckon it's both at once here.

WARMING UP

What is there to write about?

To me, now, this seems like the least of the problems. You only have to look through the transcripts in this part of the pack, or look through a few issues of *Write First Time*, to see how much people have to say about how many different subjects. But I know it worries some people when they start out.

You may want to give yourself some warming-up time. If you use it by sitting with a pen in your hand looking at the empty page, you may find your mind freezes solid instead of warming up. In my experience, the best way to warm up is by talking.

Talk goes on at the tea break anyway. It doesn't have to stop there; bring it into the learning space and time as well. Once a group is happy talking, they don't have to talk for that special purpose. You can slice out any bit of a conversation and it's full of things you might write about, if you want to. You will need to focus differently when you start writing, but the subject matter is there.

This first extract came late in a teaching session, after we had talked and written and read; it's part of the process of growing the next things to write.

Sue M: Do we depend on what other people think we are? Wear the sort of clothes that we think we ought to wear in certain situations?
Edith: I think actually life puts pressures on you – normal life – doesn't it?
Shirley: I'll wear what I want and blow everyone else.
Sue S: Well up to a point you do, but you also wear what's in the shops. If you want to be really bizarre, you've actually got to take a lot of trouble over it, it's easier to look like everybody else.

Shirley: If you come wearing something completely different, you feel as if you've got to be very brave. You say, 'this is me and I don't care–'
Edith: My sister was like that – she used to make all her own hats, she used to design them; you never saw her out without a hat. And I used to say to her – she's dead now, she got killed when she was twenty-three, and I think if she had lived, she would have been picked out in a crowd anywhere, because she just didn't care, she dressed to suit herself, and she used to go to chapel every Sunday and she used to wear the most lovely hats. I daren't wear them . . . . She used to hold herself, she used to think, 'Oh, I'm me, I'm walking down the street' – you could see it oozing out of her – I'm me and nobody else'. But I wouldn't have dared wear the hats that she wore. She always used to put together outfits to go with them as well, and we used to have sessions making clothes, she used to make hats and I used to do dressmaking. 'Oh, I won't have this, I'll have so-and-so.' Like big baggy suits – 'Ee, no, I'll never wear that'. But *she* would, she would.
Sue M: But do we all fall into the trap of saying to our daughters or our sons, 'Oh, you ought to be wearing this because you're a girl,' and 'Wear that if you're a boy'.
Shirley: My son is more interested in clothes than what my daughter is, you know; he'll go around shops – 'Oh, I like that, Mum'. She'll go, 'Hmm'. She just isn't interested at all. You give her a book and she'll sit and read, but give her clothes to look at–
Hilda: My daughter's got a mind of her own. She's well ahead –she encourages me sometimes.
Sue S: When you talk about the difference between boys' and girls' clothes getting less, what you actually mean is that girls are wearing what used to be boys' clothes.
Moira: You know, now if a boy was to choose to wear a skirt you would think he was really disturbed.
Sue M: But they used to wear skirts.
Edith: They used to be in frocks till they went to school sort of.
Sue S: I guess it's like – boys wearing make-up now, isn't it?
Moira: Thinking about boys with make-up, have you seen him? (holding up a picture of Boy George).
Shirley: He's not a boy, he's a girl.
Sue M: In fact he looks more girl than some girls.
Edith: He's very nice looking, very nice looking.
Hilda: Well, he's doing what he likes.

Edith wrote two pieces at home: one about her sister, and the one that appears in section C4, p. 6.

This group wasn't as relaxed: they hadn't worked as a group so much, or made so much use of talking together. We needed a more formal way of warming up. We tried using our five senses to call up memories. We all had different pasts: Nicola from Southern Italy, Cliff from Jamaica, Kiem from Vietnam; most of the others grew up in South Yorkshire, and Sue in Surrey.

Sue: Let's start with smells.
Nicola: I remember always the smell when my grandma cooking. (Laughs.) . . . I think maybe when you were young especially, you know, particularly you always seem to remember what is most nice.
Sue: People often say grandma's cooking rather than mother's . . . . Kiem, can you remember a smell from the old days? It could be a nice one, it could be a nasty one . . . .
Kiem: Yes.

Sue: What is it?
Kiem: 30 years ago, I work in the laboratory, sometimes chemical smell very–
Sue: Yes, very sharp smell.
Kiem: Yes.
Sue: That's a good one. Faith, can you remember a smell from when you were little?
Faith: Yes, and it played a lot of part in my life – hospital smells.
Sue: Yes. Hospital smells. I do know what you mean.
Faith: And the fear–
Sue: Yes, and the fear that goes with that. Have you got one?
Jan: Yes. Sour milk. You know when they used to bring the crates of milk in and they used to warm them up on the radiator. (Laughs.)
Sue: Yes, I do remember. What about Liz?
Liz: I was thinking back to my grandmother before Nicola said that – cookery smells.
Sue: I won't write that, it's down there. Cliff, have you got a smell?
Cliff: Well, um, when food smelling, like when my old lady be able to cook rice and peas.
Sue: George: what about you?
Cliff: Oh yes, you know, when one time them cooking you open that door so. (Laughs.)
George: I'm thinking that – yes. First time I tasted beer.
Sue: That's got to come under taste– (Laughs.)
George: Very nice.
Jan: Smell as well.
Sue: Can you think of a smell, though. They go very close together, I know, in your mind, but–
George: That'll be a nice smell – Yorkshire pudding done in a coal fire.
Jan: Yes, yes, why not. Mmm. Beautiful.
Sue: But do they smell different when they're cooked in a coal fire?
George: Yes – mmm; yes, a lot better.
Sue: Do you cook them actually in the fire or is it on a range?
George: Oven aside of t'fire. Coal heating fire like . . . .
Sue: OK, let's try sounds . . . .
Nicola: The bells, you know, ringing, always remember – my village, like. Every time I go, early morning, always something special like, to wake up to.
Cliff: Steel band – records, sounds of music, steel band.
George: Pens scratching.
Sue: And chalk scratching on the blackboard.
Faith: Oh yes.
Sue: Yes. Got anything else? Anything coming to mind?
Faith: Fire engines, and ambulances.
Jan: Hospitals again.
Sue: Did they frighten you as well?
Faith: Yes. All. Both them, specially ambulances. And I'll never forget that day.
Sue: Kiem, any sounds?
Kiem: Aeroplane and bombardment. Because I live in 30 years continuing for war . . . . And after eight day sometime I shake hand with the God, because when I living here and the bomb maybe ten metre, and I live with death; and I have a bombing and death was – three times, four days, escape from death.
Sue: That must be a sound you're . . .
George: Never forget that.

SHARING

* We all joined in, tutors and students alike. Everyone needs to know what they get out of sharing thoughts and memories in this way, and where they want to keep things to themselves. A group needs time to build up trust.

WRITING

* What do you think the people in these groups might choose to write about?
* Can you see where someone gets on a subject that she could be encouraged to take further?
* Would it be useful to have some notes from the talk, in case people forget what they have said? Or to have a tape recorder running? (Look on to the next section, 'Catching the words'.)

LISTENING

* Sometimes it isn't what you say, it's what someone else says, that gets your mind working. Is there anything in these conversations that *you* could use as a starting point?
* These people are also learning about each other – is that important?

WASTING TIME?

* Some people get anxious about spending time talking: it can't really be work! Just because you enjoy it, it isn't bad for you. Talk can teach you a lot about what you think and what you want to say.
* Sometimes the talk runs away. One of you, or all of you, says much more than will ever get written down. Or you talk yourself past the point where there's any pressure to write. This may not matter at all: not all talk has to be warm-up for writing. You and your tutor will get better at knowing when to stop, so that there's still some energy left for writing or dictating.

To satisfy your curiosity, here's part of one piece of writing that came out of the 'Five senses' session.

SUNDAY DINNER

' . . . We played football until half past one, then my mother shouted us in for dinner, and we took no notice, then my dad came to the wall and he shouted, and then we went in.

We washed us hands in the sink, then we sat down, and my mother served the dinner out. We were all ready for it. The Yorkshire pudding came first. It was a big square one in a big pudding tin, and my mother cooked it in an oven with a coal fire. They were like back to back houses, with just one room downstairs and one door. That room was kitchen and living room and all in one. There was a coal place inside the room, and the coal man used to deliver the coal inside the house. My dad worked in the pit, and we used to get it through the pit. We got it a ton at a time.

Then after the pudding, we had potatoes, meat and vegetables. Sometimes we had the gravy from the roast on the pudding, but the best was rabbit gravy. My brother used to go round catching them with ferrets. Then came sponge bun, or something like that, with custard.

After dinner, we went back out playing football for the afternoon, and we played while dusk – while we couldn't see the ball. Father went to bed, and mother did the washing up.

With a coal fire, you used to get the oven so hot, that the whole bottom of the oven was red. So the pudding would cook quicker, and it was more crispy. It doesn't taste the same if you cook it in a gas oven.'

CATCHING THE WORDS

When you've got yourself talking, one way or another – when you are sure you have something to say – does that mean the words are just waiting to be written? Not always. It's encouraging, that your brain will make ideas and meanings, and turn them out as words and sentences. But putting them down is a different process.

There are probably two kinds of change that need to happen before you can go from saying something to writing it quickly. One you will have thought about a lot – you need to be more confident at spellings, and maybe at punctuation. Though you can write a lot without marking where the stops are.

The other you may not have thought about so much. It's training yourself to remember what you have said, so it stays around long enough for you to do the writing. Everyone has to do this. Even fast and experienced writers can't write as fast as they think. They have to put bits of the meaning on 'hold', while they work at setting them down.

So while you're learning these two habits – confidence at setting down, and remembering – you need ways of keeping the ideas around while you struggle with them.

One way is, of course, to use the tape recorder. This group in Manchester were discussing how to use it.

Rose: I think using the tape, if you have something in your mind, and you sit down and you say the thing and it's taping, and say then you come back there, you have your teacher with you, that tape can be playing and she can be spelling the words to you and you write it. I think it's much easier for you to keep writing down what you want to say, because every word that you put down there (on the tape), you know it going to come back to you. But keeping saying words, sometimes you have to stop again and – why I said that, and what do I say there? With the tape you can turn back.
Jean: When I'm thinking of anything to write down, I think very fast. That's why I don't spell right. So if I put a bit down on the tape, I'd most probably forget about what I was thinking about in the first place.
Patricia: You're thinking of getting some down, then stopping, then writing it out . . . .
Jean: Yes.
Patricia: But what about getting it all down on the tape first, and then stopping after about ten minutes?
Jean: Well, I've never tried it, so – I mean I've never spoken into a tape recorder before.

This is true for many people. It is a shock at first. Hearing your voice is a bit like seeing yourself in a photo – 'That can't be me'.

But you get over that. A lot of students use tape recorders with confidence, and work out their own way of doing it, as Rose has done.

Taping has problems, though. It isn't always right. For one thing, the tape may not be turned on when the talk starts flowing. Unless you have a tape recorder on all the time, there are going to be times when the words come bursting out and aren't recorded. Then you may need someone who was listening to help you re-build what you said.

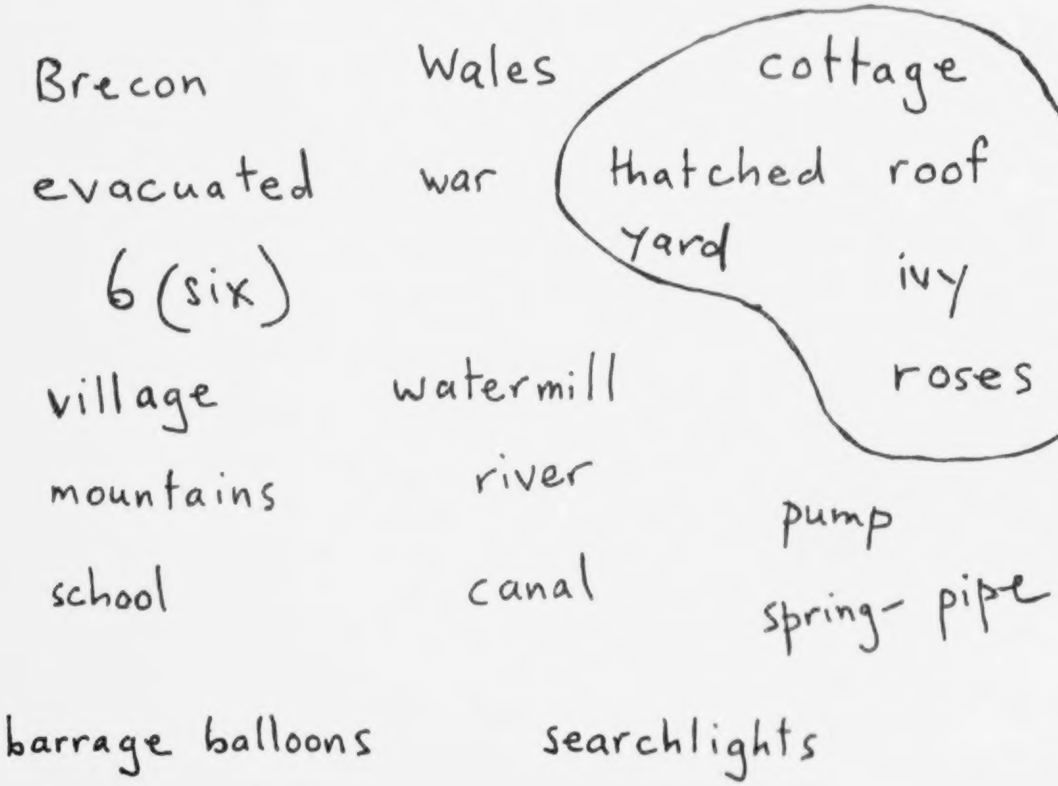
Also, it may be that from the start your memory or your ideas need help – you need someone to draw things out of you.

This next extract is from a session where both of these points were true. Michael is helping Brenda go back over some memories of Wales, where she went in the war as an evacuee from London. Brenda is worried about her memory, and loses confidence about some quite ordinary words. (I don't suppose she's talked much about 'wheat' and 'streams' since she came back to London!) This is how Michael explained what they were doing:

'I was team-teaching. The other tutor had brought in some pictures, in the hope that they might inspire discussion and writing. I don't remember the main subject of the picture that Brenda picked out, but in the background was a thatched cottage, which unleashed a store of childhood memories.

It reminded her of her war-time evacuation to Wales, and as she talked, more and more memories flooded back, some of them extremely vivid. I jotted down notes as she talked, hoping they'd help her shape a short piece of writing. But I gradually realised all these memories deserved a more major effort and a longer piece; so I suggested talking about it again with the tape recorder on, which is what we did.'

This is Michael's first catch of Brenda's words. You can see how he uses them to help her remember the second time.



Brecon
Wales
cottage
evacuated
war
thatched roof
yard
6 (six)
ivy
village
watermill
roses
mountains
river
pump
school
canal
spring- pipe
barrage balloons
searchlights

This is how part of it went the second time:

Michael: What else was there, there was this water mill?
Brenda: There was this water mill.
Michael: What was that like?
Brenda: Like a windmill, with a big door. I suppose that's where they take the wheat – is that the word?
Michael: Yes. Well, it's where they grind the corn.
Brenda: Yes, the corn and that.
Michael: The water makes the wheel turn round, and the wheel–
Brenda: Yes, and there was a little river out the side. If any traffic wasn't careful, they would have gone into the river bit at the edge of the road.
Michael: Quite dangerous, was it?
Brenda: Yes, it was.
Jim: Did you fall in?
Brenda: I suppose a lot of people fell in, I don't know if I ever did.
Michael: Where was the pump?
Brenda: In the middle of the field – yes. We had to go into the field to get water, we didn't have it near us in our garden. So we had to go quite a way to get it. We had to pump it.
Michael: In a bucket?
Brenda: Yes.
Michael: – And carry it back home?
Brenda: Yes.
Michael: And did you have to get it from the spring, did you say?
Brenda: Yes, spring.
Michael: What was the spring like?
Brenda: Well, it was on a little lump of the – ground . . . . You know, the grass – the turf – it was sort of lumpy, you know what I mean, and it was standing on the–
Michael: Hilly?
Brenda: On the – and the pipe was standing like stuck to the ground.
Michael: It made a little river, did it?
Brenda: They had little stones beside it, if I remember right. And the water just went down like, you know, a waterfall. Like a waterfall. And there was a stream, I think you call it a stream, don't you? Yes, a stream – in that part of the field, yes, that's it, I can just see it.
Michael: Yes. Got lots to write about.
Brenda: And I think on the bank, there were some primroses and things like that growing. It's all coming back. Primroses, that's it.

This is how this part of Brenda's memories came out when they had finished working on it together. It has changed a lot. Michael has done a lot of the work. He isn't doing it instead of Brenda: he's showing her how her thoughts come together, how she can make something of what she has worked to remember.

'There was this watermill, I remember. I suppose that's where they take the wheat, it's for grinding the corn. There was a river at the side. If the traffic wasn't careful, they would have gone into the river. It was at the edge of the road. It was dangerous. I suppose a lot of people fell in. I can't remember if I ever did.

There was a pump, in the middle of the field. We had to go into the field to get water, we didn't have it in the cottage. We had to go quite a way to get it. We had to pump it with a handle and carry it home in a bucket.

Sometimes we got water from the spring. The grass was hilly and the pipe from the spring came up from the ground, and the water was coming up. It made a little river, with little stones at the side, and the water just went down like a waterfall, so there was a stream in the middle of the field. On the bank I think there were some primroses and things like that growing. It's all coming back.'

TAPES AND TRANSCRIPTS

* If you want everything that's on a tape written down, it will take time! Ten minutes' talk will take a fast worker about 40 minutes to do. Is there anyone in your centre who can do this kind of work?

* You need to get used to reading talk as it's written down from a tape. It doesn't look like how you write. It sometimes looks messy and unfinished. But the whole idea is that you can now work on it and finish it.

* Try reading it aloud, if you can. You turn it back into talk, and it sounds better. Try reading it like a play.

THINGS GET LOST

* If you have to go over something more than once, things get lost, even with a helper, or a tape. Ideas come out hot. When you say it again more deliberately, they can cool down and feel less strong. Don't worry! It happens to everyone. We all have to translate from talk into writing.

* And remember, this is a learning stage. You will learn to hold on to more of your own words. Then not so much will get lost.

WHAT'S THE TUTOR DOING?

* Michael asks a lot of questions. Sometimes Brenda only answers with a 'Yes'. He's remembering what Brenda said before. Is it OK to build this in to a piece of writing?

* Does it help just to have someone with you, to keep showing interest? Does it help you to finish what you have to say? Does it always have to be the tutor who does this?

THINGS GET FOUND

* Brenda remembers more the second time she talks about her memories. One thing leads to another: you find new things as you talk. It's a good reason for talking before you write.

* Whether you talk or tape or write straight away, what you write down may surprise you. Some people who have studied writing say, 'Writing is discovery'. Does this match up with your experience?

PLANNING

* A tape, or a transcript from a tape, or a set of notes like Michael's may not be all of what you want to say. But they will help you to plan. Once the words are out there in one form or another, you can move them around and build on them. You can use your reading skills to help you work on your writing. Look on to sections A5, A6 and A7 for ideas on re-writing and planning.

READING BACK

The work you have here was done over three meetings. At the first one, Cliff wrote by himself. At the second one, Liz, his tutor, wrote down what he told her to write. They read it over and made a few changes. They weren't quite sure what to do about Cliff's Jamaican English and Liz wasn't quite sure she heard it right. (See also Section A9, 'Different English'.)

At the end of the second meeting, several people in the group read their work out. Liz read Cliff's story. It was the first time the group had done this; they enjoyed it, but they weren't used to commenting on each other's work or asking questions. We taped the conversation.

At the third meeting, I brought back this bit of the conversation typed out from the tape. We looked at it together, and saw how Cliff's story changed as he told it to us instead of writing it down.

Cliff wrote this himself:

'I like to go home to Jamaica to see my mother and father and sisters. I go to school in Jamaica but I did was sickly when I was small'

He told Liz to write this:

'I've live in Sheffield for 22 years. I love Sheffield for it is quiet. I like England because it is a nice place to live in. Only one thing, it is a bit cold to live in.

When I come to this country things were a little bit better than now, for you could get a job anywhere you go. Jobs was badly paid in those days and easy to get, but now jobs are better paid but harder to get. Now you can't get a job, don't care how hard you try.

The first job I get when I come here was in building, labouring. Then me and the gaffer is getting on fine, for he gave me a proper job as a skilled man. When I leave that job, I get a job in London, at Telegraph. I come and see a gaffer there, and he tell me to bring all my papers. When I bring my papers, there was a recommendation paper, and that gaffer ask me where I get that paper from. I said I get it from where I was working. When I call for that paper they couldn't give it to me. I ask, "What did you do with that paper?" He couldn't answer. Then I have to catch the manager, he said, "I burn it!" and his remarks said he don't know where me get that paper from. Then the manager take me to the office and tell me that any time me leaving the job, me must call back to the office and they will give me a proper recommendation paper, and I said, "Thank you very much".

This was the part of the discussion that we looked at together.

Sue: Is there anything in Cliff's piece that anyone else wanted to say anything about? Or get clear? I think it's true what you say about jobs then, that they used to be worse paid but easier to get, and now it's the other way round.
Cliff: Oh yes: for when I come here – yes, you walk a bit, for look a job, but after, things start to picked up, and creep up a bit; then you can leave a job and picked up another one. But in those days what we talking about, things was – was way down here: so you get it rough in a sense. And today, money is available upon job, but there is no job about. This is where the problem coming. I think in the long run, in this country, everybody have to mind how you walk on the street – yes? You have to mind how you walk on the street, for everyone looking for easier money, a easier way to live.

Sue: Yes . . . . I'm not completely clear about this recommendation paper story. What was wrong with this paper that you gave him?
Cliff: Well, the other paper gave from – that workplace; I think it was Darnall, that time them go build up Darnall. And when I go up there, I go as ordinary labourer, and this start now you have to do a lot of asphalting work–
Sue: A lot of what kind of work?
Cliff: Asphalting. Well, this asphalting make by joint. They make it by joint – you know, by size. And every one of those breadth have a joint in it, and every so far up you have a joint, and you have to go through those joint, and get your blow-lamp, and get your float, and hot that asphalt until it become watery, you know; and keep on press it in, press it in, until you get it smooth like the table. And you can't put no crack in. Anywhere you stop you have to make a mark there. And when you start again, you have to melt up that place now, and keep and go on. Well, when me went out to the job, the job there already finish. And when they put water in there, everything start to leak. So them have to start it all over again. Strip it out and start from scratch.
Sue: Sounds like my plumbing.
Cliff: And when I go there, this chap said to me say – is a Russian bloke, speak very deep; he said to me say "Ge' a bucki!" "Good god, me say, what is a bucki?" He say, "Hey, Williams, you: ge' a bucki!" I couldn't understand what him talking about. Anyway, the gaffer said to me say, "Go and get a – take that bucket from over there". I say, "Why him cannot talk like that?" Him say, "No, him a different countryman – like you". [Everybody laughs.]

Anyway, me go and take the bucket. I get a asphalt bucket, get a electric bucket, he give me a float and give me a blow-lamp; and he start the job like from here to there; and he said to me say, "Look, I going to tell you something; if you do this job right, and when they come and test the bottom here and it don't soak with water, then you get the job". And that's what me does. Then when I leaving the job – this firm was from Birmingham, and when the job finish, they couldn't take me with them; so the gaffer said to me say, "Well then, all what I can do then, I going to give you something, keep it with you, and anywhere you going a de work, you take this and get a job". Well, I go to – a friend of mine was working at London, that time they was knocking down Telegraph, then I get a job round there. And I meet up this gaffer, who was a right one, eh? Never like me at all.
Nicola: As bad as the first one.
Cliff: So anyway – the paper them leave at Labour. If me have it with me, he would get it; but the paper didn't come from Labour. So him say I must go and get them, and I go to Labour, and Labour say they will send it down, and Labour send it down, and all those paper now, him pick out the best one out of there, and he never give it me back. And when it come to the finalities, him think he burn it.
Diana: *He* had burnt it!
Sue: Why did he do that, though?
Cliff: Well – I tell you something, the paper what me got, it was highly recommendation, you know, highly recommend; now, for I can take that paper and go and get any job . . . . Well, not any job, the same job, you see; and anywhere me go in the world with it, and so long me have it, me get a job.
Janice: So it was a written reference.
Cliff: Yes.
Sue: So he's just giving you a hard time, really? Because you've got a good recommendation, he doesn't want you to have it? Why would he burn it?
Cliff: I don't know what make him do it, for when I – when me ask him that question, he couldn't give me a proper answer what make him do it, but is the first him see me; you

know, is the first him see me that I can't know what make him do it; for it seem to me the paper was highly recommend.

Sue: It's important to get that clear, because one way of hearing it, as I just heard it the first time, it was almost as if what he might be saying is, "Oh, what was on that paper wasn't good, I'll give you a better one". Now I understand now that it wasn't so, but that was how I heard it the first time I listened to it; maybe he was saying he would give you a better recommendation than that one.

Cliff: Well, he couldn't give me a better recommendation than that paper what me have there. He only could have give me a recommendation upon the type of job what he have.

Sue: Sure, I understand that now, but I didn't understand it properly the way you told it first, that's why I want to get it clear.

DEVELOPING

* In what ways has Cliff's story changed? Has it just got longer, or changed in other ways?

* What has made it change? These are some of the things that could have done it:

– it's easier to talk than to write;

– remembering some makes him remember more;

– it's good to have people listening and laughing;

– people are asking him questions.

Which of them seem important from your own experience?

DIFFERENT ENGLISH

* Cliff makes a joke about 'being a different countryman'. We can tell that from the way he talks. And the more his talk flows free, the more Jamaican he gets . . . with a bit of Sheffield thrown in.

What should he do about this when he comes to write? Does it matter?

Does it cramp your style if you try to change your English the first time you write something down?

FOCUS

* What do you think is the main point of Cliff's story? If he wanted to do a second draft, what should he concentrate on? (See also section A7, 'Planning'; I've done a diagram there.)

USING THE GROUP

* What do you think Cliff got out of talking with the group? Do you think his story is better when he tells it than when he wrote it? In what ways?

* If it's better, how can he put these good points into his written story? Will the tape help? Would it have been useful to talk before he started?

* Does your group read work to each other? It's frightening the first time; but it's good to know someone is listening.

WORDS

* I didn't know what a 'float' was.

* 'Gaffer' is a word with an interesting history. Do people use it where you come from?

* What's another word for what Cliff called a 'recommendation paper'?

RE-WRITING: MAKING SUGGESTIONS

A lot of what we write in a class or at home, we only have one go at.

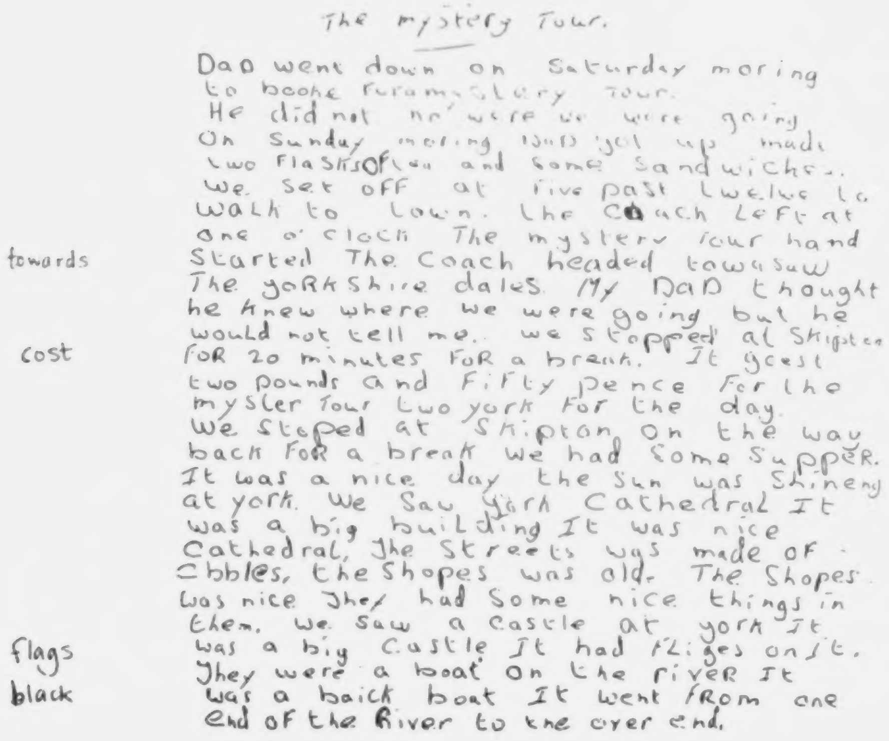
There are good reasons for this. We haven't much time. It's hard work to do once, so twice is even harder work. You can get fed up with something if you keep going over it. And, of course, some writing is fine the first time – as good as it will ever get.

But there are also bad reasons for only writing once. Our experience from school is that we write something once and hand it in to be marked. We may feel that if we were better writers, we wouldn't have to re-write; so re-writing feels like failure.

In fact, experienced writers re-write and cross out and try again. They learn to see a piece of writing as a draft, not as a first and last chance to get it right.

To practise this, a group in Sheffield looked at a piece by a writer we had never met. We thought we would be less shy about this than if we started by commenting on our own writing. It's also a way of seeing how a reader can help a writer sort out what she wants to say. You could do the same with a piece from a student magazine or book. Or you could swap with another group at your centre, or another student in your area.

This piece was written by Jean in Blackburn a couple of years before, and I had been shown it by her tutor. We hadn't asked her if we could use it like this at the time when we read it, but we have now. Here it is. You may want to have your own discussion before you read ours.



The mystery Tour.

Dad went down on Saturday moring
to booke fura mystery Tour.
He did not no were we were going
On Sunday moring Dad got up made
two FlasksOftea and Some Sandwiches.
We set off at five past twelve to
walk to town. the Coach Left at
one o'clock The mystery tour hand
towards Started The Coach headed towasaw
The yoRkShire dales. My DaD thought
he knew where we were going but he
would not tell me. we Stopped at Skipton
cost FoR 20 minutes FoR a break. It gcest
two Pounds and Fifty pence For the
mysler Tour two york For the day.
We Steped at Skipton On the way
back FoR a break we had Some SuppeR.
It was a nice day the Sun was Shineng
at york. We Saw york Cathedral It
was a big building It was nice
Cathedral, The Streets was made of
cbbles, the Shopes was old. The Shopes
was nice They had Some nice things in
them. we saw a castle at york It
flags was a big Castle It had fLiges on it.
They were a boat On the riveR It
black was a baick boat It went fRom one
end of the River to the orer end.

We agreed that we wouldn't concentrate on corrections. We just picked out the words that made it hard to read: the right spellings of these words are in the margin. Then we worked through some questions about other aspects of the story. I've put the questions in, as introductions to parts of our discussion.

HAS JEAN TOLD US ALL WE NEED TO KNOW? DOES THE STORY MAKE SENSE?

Sue: We've got some suggestions for later, when we come to talk about shape. But it isn't incomplete, it's a whole story. Do you agree? And you want to know what happens when she starts off?

HAS SHE TOLD US ALL WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW? IF SHE WERE HERE, WHAT QUESTIONS WOULD WE ASK HER?

Joan: Well, she could have said more of what she'd actually done in York.
David: What does this boat do? Is it a ferry boat? Did she go on it?
Bill: Where did it start from, this mystery tour?
Joan: They didn't get long, did they, starting at one o'clock. When did they get back?

HAS THE STORY COME OUT IN THE RIGHT ORDER?

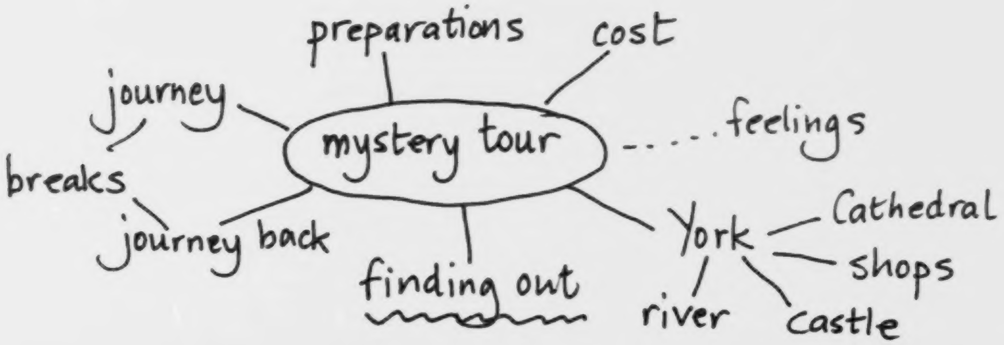
Sue: Not completely, we thought. Which bits would we want to move?
Joan: Well, I would move this –' 'When Dad went down to book the tour' – mention the price then. Take the bit about £2.50.
David: I've went back from 'On the way back we stopped at Skipton', and then she started talking about York.
Marian: Maybe we should put that down the bottom somewhere – stopping for supper.
Sue: But that leaves you with a real problem – we've left the bit where she says they're going to York, and it's not joined on to anything.
Marian: She needs to re-write a bit there, doesn't she?
Sue: The problem is, since it started off as a mystery, at what point does she say that it's York they are going to?
Eileen: If it were me, I'd have been looking for signs –to find out where I am going to. Road signs.
Marian: Does York stand up on a hill, does it have anything that's outstanding as you approach it?
Bill: There's a wall round it.
David: There's a castle, ruins of a castle on a mound.
Sue: OK, so we've got two solutions: somebody spotted a sign, or somebody recognized York when they got there. But we'd have to ask Jean what really happened. Do you agree, it needs a sentence of its own, that moment when she works it out?

DO YOU THINK ANY OF IT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER SAID?

Sue: She's falling back on that word 'nice' a lot, isn't she? Any other ways of saying that?
Eileen: 'It was a gorgeous day'.
Joan: Or 'a sunny day'.
Sue: What about the cathedral?
Joan: Put 'impressive', or even mention the stained glass windows.
David: 'Magnificent'. You could spend more time at that.
Marian: Did she go into it?
Sue: I'll bring in pictures and ask her what she saw. You can't force someone to be interested in things, but you can feel around a bit more for what she was interested in . . . . What else is happening here?

Marian: She's shortening the sentences. You could turn all those short sentences into one, and it wouldn't be so choppy.
David: She's putting a word down what she can spell, rather than taking a gamble and making a mistake.

WOULD IT BE CLEARER IF IT WAS IN SEPARATE PARAGRAPHS?
Joan: Myself – start a new paragraph once they'd arrived at York.
Marian: I'd split it one more time before that.
Sue: Can we do a diagram of it? there's block one, which is the preparations. Buying the ticket, the flasks and so on. Then you've got your actual journey – and the breaks, she's thought of both the breaks at once, that's why that has gone in the wrong order. Then York itself, and then the journey home. You could do more about York itself, that's what we've said, more details and more about how she felt about it.
David: In other words, you could write a book.


preparations
cost
journey
mystery tour
feelings
breaks
journey back
finding out
York
Cathedral
shops
river
castle

QUESTIONS

* Were these useful questions to ask about a piece of writing? Can you think of other ones? Could you ask these questions about a piece of your own writing?

CORRECTING

* Often, as students and as tutors, our first impulse is to correct. Is it OK to put this off, until some of the other kinds of sorting out have been done?
Do you agree with David, that going for correctness can stop you using a harder word you have in your mind?

DRAFTS

* Here are some questions another teacher of writing suggests you can ask:
– what is the draft trying to say?
– What did you hear in the draft which surprised you?
– What did you hear that was most interesting?
– What sounds best?
– What sounds so right it can be developed further?
– What questions does the draft ask?†
–

These questions make it sound as if the draft has a life of its own. Does that make sense to you?

READERS

* When you move over to working on your own writing, you may want to use your group members for questions or comment. You may just want to use your tutor. In the end, you will have to do the job for yourself: to look at your writing as if you were a reader and not just the writer. It may be easier if you leave it for a while.
John Glynn, from the Gatehouse Project in Manchester, describes how he learned to do this:

Sue: When do you think you started seeing something as a draft, rather than a finished thing? Because it strikes me that's an important move, that a lot of people never make.
John: That's right, yes. I think that was when I was working at Gatehouse, when we do writing workshops – somebody would write something, and I'd see that, and to me, that could be done better. I felt I was going back to people and saying, 'Look, you can do better than that, I know you can; you probably don't'. And I probably hadn't made the connection with myself. You can see it on other people–
Sue: That's right, I have a hunch it comes that way round, for some people anyway. You can look at someone else's writing, and say, 'Oh, I see a few things about that that could change,' and then maybe you do just take that back to yourself.

* How important is it that tutors should write in the class too, and show how they have to work on their writing?
(We'll talk about this in section B2, *What's the tutor doing?*

† Donald M. Murray: *Learning by teaching*. p. 63

RE-WRITING: YOUR OWN WORK

This time, we are looking at a student re-drafting her own work, with a tutor helping and a tape recorder running.

The first draft was done in a workshop of Caribbean students in Manchester, with tutors from the Gatehouse Project, who publish books by students. First there was a tape, and then Cloeta wrote a draft on her own. That is what she is reading over here.

The workers from Gatehouse are thinking of making another book about the experiences of Caribbean people in Manchester. (They have already made one: *Who feels it, knows it.*) So Cloeta has a definite reason for looking at her draft again: it has to be clear to readers who were not involved in the talk that led up to the writing. All they will have to go on are the words on the page.

Cloeta is working on her draft by reading it aloud, with Stella listening and commenting. The bits in *italics* are the bits that they read out from the first draft. Cloeta doesn't read perfectly, but even so, she decides to read rather than listen.

This time, we can look in detail at the changes that are made. It is quite hard to do this. So I have put numbers in the margin, to make it easier to refer to particular points.

We start after Cloeta has read the beginning of her piece.

Stella: Now I'd like to stop you just there, because when I read it through, and you get all these 'she's', it makes me wonder who this 'she' means; and I wonder whether, when this is a book and somebody who is strange to you is reading it, whether it will be clear to them who this 'she' is. Just let me read it through to you again, first. *It just one Saturday I go to the market, and there was a lady said to me, 'Who is your father?' and I told her, so she said she will tell my mother for me.* Now it's clear that 'she' is the lady. OK, so *she said she will tell my mother for me, and in two weeks' time she came for me and take me home.*
Cloeta: Oh, this 'she' be my mother.
Stella: It's your mother. OK.
Cloeta: Where shall we start again?
Stella: Perhaps here – 'so she . . .'.
Cloeta: Yes. *So she said she will tell my mother for me.*
But this lady is the one that I saw in the market and she asked me that question, *so she said she will tell my mother for me, and in two weeks' time she came for me.* And I think we'll have to change that round, because it was my mother came for me. What really happening, I've sent a message to my mother to tell her that I'm not going to school, and I'm asking her to come and see me now – try and get me back home, because I'm not treating very nice and I want to go back to my parents. So I sent a message with this lady to tell my mother. So she went back and see my mother and she told her, and then – two weeks' time, said about two weeks' time then, my mother sorry, my mother came for me and she took me home.
(1) **Stella**: So here instead of 'she', 'my mother'. OK.

Cloeta: Could you just change that–

Stella: Certainly we could. OK, *my mother came for me and take me home.* Shall I read a bit now?

(2) **Cloeta**: I'll carry on with reading. *At that time I was twelve years old. She took me back to school.* I could just put here, 'I was twelve years old when my mother took me back to school'. *My mother took me back to school and I was so shame to go back just in A class, so I did not go back. But when I grow up I realise about my future. My future was so bad – was so sad.* So sad. Generally – it was so sad.

Stella: *Anyway–*

(3) **Cloeta**: *Anyway, I have got a job so I begin to work.*

Should put 'began'. So I begin to work . . . . Shall we make it to be 'began' or leave it there 'begin'(?

Stella: Well, it's your choice, Cloeta.

Cloeta: 'Began' sounds much better, isn't it? *I began to work, so that I could help my mother and father, and that was where my life started for a few more years. Then I met my future husband. I was engaged for three years, then I got married. My husband came to England in March 1962 and I came in August 1962 and I started to work 5th October at a cotton mill. I work for ten years and nine months, the reason for leaving, the cotton dust was getting on to my chest. A friend sent me to North Hulme* . . . . I think – the cotton was getting on my chest.

Stella: Have you got anything–

Cloeta: Yes, well before I put in this now; we could put something in there. – But at that time when I leave that job, I've got another job at Edwards the butchers, and I've worked there for four years and then I met a friend. So I could just put that piece – have you got a bit of paper?

Stella: The thing is, that's on tape now, so I can get to that piece and I'll put just what you suggested. OK? Shall I put a mark to remind me?

Cloeta: Yes.

(4) **Stella**: I'll put, 'Use tape here'. Yes, and that will join that piece very nicely.
Cloeta: *A friend sent me to North Hulme to see the headmaster, and he explained everything to me. So I went back to school.* I went back – this should be, I went back and gave my notice in, you see. Instead of 'school' there should put, 'I went back and gave my notice in', because I was working at that time.
Stella: Right, so shall we just put, 'So I went back and gave my up job'?
Cloeta: Yes.
Stella: OK. So I'll cross out those two words.
Cloeta: *And gave up my job. I started the school. It was very good. I got my wages every week on Thursday.*
Stella: Should that be Thursday? It says Tuesday.
Cloeta: On Tuesday, yes. My mistake. *On Tuesday. I attended school every day for one year. When the end of the terms was up, I had to take a test, maths.* Should put 'a maths test'. Should put in 'a' in there. A maths test.
Stella: That word can go here. That's fine.
Cloeta: *When I take the test I was very nervous that day when I take it. But at last I was glad, for I had passed my test. One month later I went to Salford College. In my first week there they learn us to make bread. Then on my second week all my troubles began when they send me to do survey and all the recipes to write down. So I could not do it, so I went back to the head teacher, and he write to the office for me and I got back my money.* The reason for that, at that time I bought all my – we should had things to make up the cake, you know, to decorate the cake, and I've spend about £58 and bought some books and – the cake decorating books and the uniform and the pinafore and towels and hand towels and everything. And I – preparing to do the catering course, but I didn't know I had to go through all that. I thought they was going to show us the practical things what to do, but they didn't do that. They just sit over there and said – tell you the recipe. You had to write down like, a pound and a half of sugar and half a pound of butter and marzipan, so and so, you know, and it's a very big class and – they just told you what to do and I couldn't cope with it. So I went back and explained to the head teacher, so he wrote this letter for me so that I could got the money back, what I have spent to bought all those things. And that's the reason why this piece of writing just came in like that.

(5) **Stella**: So from what you said, we can fit an explanation in about why you had some money to get back, because without that explanation I thought it was the money you paid to go on the course.
Cloeta: No, no, no.
Stella: Right, OK. That's good.

This is the second draft that they agreed on, when Stella had added the new bits from the tape:

'I was born in Jamaica and my mother was very poor so I grow up with a step-mother. She treat me very bad. She did not send me to school. Most of the time she learn me to do gardening and most of the time to fetch water. Some times I go to school just one day of the week. It just one Saturday I go to the market and there was a lady said to me "Who is your father?" and I told her, so she said she will tell my mother for me, and in two weeks' time my mother came for me and take me home.

At that time I was twelve years old. My mother took me back to school and I was so shame to go back just in A class, so I did not go back. But when I growing up I realise about my life was so sad. Anyway, I have got a job so I began to work so that I could help my mother and father and that was where my life started for a few more years.

Then I met my future husband, I was engaged for three years, then I got married. My husband came to England in March 1962 and I came in August 1962 and I started to work 5th October at a cotton mill. I work for ten years and nine months, the reason for leaving, the cotton dust was getting onto my chest. At that time when I leave that job, I've got another job at Edwards the butchers, and I've worked there for four years and then I've met a friend.

This friend sent me to North Hulme to see the Headmaster and he explained everything to me. So I went back and gave up my job. I start the school, it was very good. I got my wages every week on Tuesday. I attended school every day for one year. When the end of the terms was up, I had to take a [Maths] test. When I take the test I was very nervous that day when I take it. But at last I was glad for I had passed my test.

One month later I went to Salford College. On my first week there they learn us to make bread. Then on my second week all my troubles began when they sent me to do survey and all recipes to write down. But I didn't know I had to go through all that. I thought they was just going to show us the practical things what to do. But they didn't do that. They just sit over there and tell you the recipe. You had to write down like, 'one and a half pounds of sugar' and 'half a pound of butter and marzipan so and so'. It's a very big class and they just told you what to do and I couldn't cope with it. I went back and explained to the Head Teacher so he wrote this letter for me, so that I could get back the money what I've spent. The reason for that, at that time I bought all my things – some cake decorating books, the uniform, the pinafore, towels and hand towels and everything, preparing to do the catering course. I spend about £50. So I leave the school and my sister got a job for me. But I still go to the night school, it is very useful to me. I am still going, now I am learning dressmaking.'

CHANGES

* At point 1: Have they got enough in about Cloeta sending the message home? Would you bring in more of what Cloeta said on the tape?
* At point 2: Is Cloeta suggesting a different arrangement of the sentences?
* At point 3: How does Stella react when Cloeta comments on the choice between 'begin' and 'began'? Is this what you think the tutor should do?
* At point 4: Who is going to write down what is on the tape? Are there other ways of filling in new bits like this? Which way would you like to work, if it was your own work?
* At point 5: What is happening here? What is important about the new stuff that Cloeta adds here? Does it help you understand the story?
* Does the second draft have all the changes that you expected?

READING

* Do you think it is important that Cloeta decides to do the reading herself?
It seems to me that it helps her listen to her own words.
When she does this, things come clear.
For some people, it's easier to listen if someone else does the reading.

CONTROL

* Do you think Cloeta is in control of the re-writing?
* The re-writing process takes time and patience.
Would it be different if Cloeta could not read her story so well? Or if she could write more on her own? How would it be different?
* Do you think it is worth re-drafting your work?

PLANNING

A bit late in the day to be talking about planning?

Maybe. But often planning is something you do when you work over a piece for the second time; or else when you have built up your skill and confidence in getting your ideas down, so that you aren't afraid they will slip away between thinking and writing.

I want to look quickly at three ways of planning. There are many more. You will work out your own way as you go along.

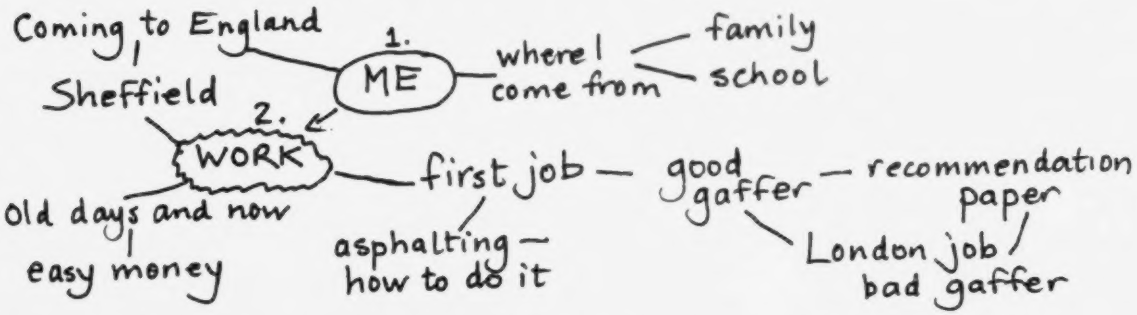
A plan may be a good way of setting out all the points you want to get into your writing, and seeing what shape they can take. It's easier to think about shape when you can see the whole thing at once. The plan may also lead you to decide to leave some points out, or it may bring up some ideas you didn't see till now.

The main thing to remember is that you plan to help your writing, not to tie it down. If you don't want to follow your plan when you come to write it out, if some other connections have started up in your mind, then you aren't bound by the plan.

I'll show you planning by diagram, planning for a story, and planning an argument.

DIAGRAM

Do you remember Cliff's writing from A4 'Reading back'? When we had read over his writing and the transcript of his talk together, we found that we could see more clearly what his subject was. I did a diagram of it that looked like this:



The diagram helped us to see that Cliff had changed his subject (this happens quite often). He started by writing about himself, in a general way; he wound up writing about work, and mostly about a particular story about work. If he wanted to make a second draft, he could organize what he said to make this point come out more clearly. He can plan now, because he has found out what he wants to say.

With experience, you can use a diagram like this as a way of catching the words as you think and talk. It can help you choose where to start and what to concentrate on. Try it when you talk together. Try it when you think on your own, before you start.

It doesn't have to be spelt right, and it doesn't have to look exactly like this. There's a page about this in *From wages to Windscale*, and it refers you to a book called *Use your head*, by

Tony Buzan, which discusses why these diagrams help us think. He calls them 'mind maps'. There are a few more in this pack, too: I've used them to map the longer sections.

STORY

Frances and Roz were working together on a story about what had happened to Frances only two days before. Their problem was not what to say, but how to keep it all under control. Frances had very strong memories of that Monday night: this is part of what she said.

Frances: Floods! from first hand experience . . . . Horror! Because we live right on the front at Morecambe – it was terrible. It was half past one-ish when my mother woke me up. She said, 'You'd better get up – we're flooded out'. She said, 'Gather the dogs and go upstairs, to the hotel lounge'. So I went up, and looked through the window, and we're on tape so I can't tell you what I said! The water was at least five feet deep in the road, it was all splashing over and coming up over the sea wall – it was horrifying, really . . . . We just sat through it and all the lights went out, we sat there freezing cold; we couldn't put the gas fire on, because the wind was blowing – it was a 90 mile an hour wind; and the wind was blowing so fiercely that it was blowing all the fumes back down the chimney . . . . And my gran – she's 87; she sleeps downstairs in the basement, and we only just got her out in time. If we'd have been two minutes later, that would have been it. There was eight foot of water down there.

Frances talked for about 20 minutes while Roz made notes. So there was something to look at when they started planning. This is how part of the planning went:

Roz: I've got to help you plan it now. When you've got something this length to write, you've got all those details – to start with, they're just in your head; you can do this sort of thing for yourself, you can just think it through and write down everything that comes into your mind.
Frances: I find it very difficult to do that sort of thing. You know, if I was trying to write something, I just start and write what comes into my head – you know, write it out like a story. And then if I think, well, if that should go there, and that should be before that – sort of put arrows, where this should go and that should go, and write it out again, and if I'm still not satisfied, I'll write it out again, you know. But I find it very difficult to write all the details down first and then – Oh, by the way, the telephone's out of order as well, and there's no electric. We can receive calls in but we can't dial out.
Roz: So; there are two possible things you do. One would be, you've got it in your head now, even more clearly probably after having talked to me about it, all the ideas, and you could just start writing in your usual style. Alternatively, I could plan this for you into a rough outline, so that you've got something to work on.
Frances: I think that would be best, really, yes. Because like you said, there's so much detail there, you know.
Roz: Now this sort of thing is the ideal stuff to write in chronological order. That seems to be the most obvious way of doing it.
Frances: How do you mean, 'chronological'?
Roz: I mean starting from the beginning and working through to the end.
Frances: Yes, yes.
Roz: And anyway we should plan it in chronological order: what happened first, what happened second, what happened third. After that we might think again. You might say, 'I'd like to describe what it's like now and then do a flash-back to the night when it happened'.

Frances: That'd be a good idea.
Roz: Right; so as far as you are concerned, this story starts from 1.30 in the morning.
Frances: Yes– I mean I could get more detail of what happened before. I mean my mother was up an hour before me.
Roz: Shall we not bother? Let's stick with you – you've got enough with yourself . . . . So suppose we have this first bit going upstairs, and then talking about what had happened to your gran, and the dogs; and then the next paragraph you might go into 'I looked out of the window', and what it looked like outside. So that you've got a paragraph which is the immediate panic indoors – I'll make 'Indoors' the sort of heading there – and then the next paragraph is about looking outside . . . . So it's what the road looked like; water five feet – are you going to be able to read this handwriting of mind? – splashing over; waves 50 feet high; highest tide since records began –
Frances: Yes, it was; and the winds were 90 mph. Do you want to put that in, that's relevant in this paragraph.
Roz: Yes. 80 m.p.h . . . . That's a long paragraph. The bit about fetching the rabbits, when did that happen? Did that happen after you'd got up – did you see them doing it?
Frances: Well, it could only have been half an hour after I come upstairs, he said, 'The rabbits! Got to go for the rabbits'.

. . . I'm sorry there isn't room to give you the whole story.

PARAGRAPHS

* Roz tries to group together what will make a paragraph. Do you think you are clear what paragraphs are for? How do you decide when to move to a new paragraph?
* Roz gives each paragraph a title. Would that help you to plan your work?

SHAPE

* Ideas have a shape in your mind before they get anywhere near being written down. Part of the problem is not to lose this shape in the process of writing.
* Roz and Frances talk about two ways of arranging a story: chronological order (straight through from what happened first to what happened last), and flashback.
Thinking about stories you have read and seen – are there any other shapes you can give a name to?
What happens when there is more than one main person in a story, or when things happen in more than one place?

THINGS GET FOUND

* Roz and Frances have agreed to work on planning. But you can see that they are still finding out what to say as well. More details come to mind as they find their place in the story.

ARGUMENT

When Roz was working with Alan, he had a bit more trouble deciding exactly what to write. He knew he wanted to write about CB radio, but he wasn't sure how.

When they found the shape for his writing, it seems to have helped the ideas to come forward. Roz is still making notes as Alan talks.

Roz: How about 'The advantages and disadvantages of –'
Alan: My CB?

Roz: Yes.
Alan: Mine's got a built-in power pack; that means you don't have to buy a transformer–
Roz: This sounds as if it would be worth doing, doesn't it? Let's try it out. Now, the first stage of planning we just want to put 'advantages' in one column, and 'disadvantages' in the other.
Alan: The built-in transformer: if you buy these little sets you can put in a car, you have to get a separate transformer; but mind, you just plug it in to t'mains. On mine, it hasn't got a built-in SWR meter. That's a meter to check if you can use your aerial. It's got like a needle –if it goes into the red, you could blow your rig up – I don't know, frequencies or something. I haven't got one of them. I've got a separate one, you see.

And you can run it off electric or battery, so if you have a power cut, you can just plug it into the battery; like with a normal rig, you just have to have battery *or* electric.
Roz: You were saying things about the price and the size.
Alan: Yes, well, it's like a big square box, and it just sits in the corner. The price is cheaper: if you get another one like mine, it'd be over £100, but mine was £75, which was cheap, you know.
Roz: Looks to me as if I'm getting a lot on the 'advantages' side.
Alan: It's got like a – you just push button to turn off, where a normal rig, you have to turn the volume and turn it off. Disadvantage, probably, you can't put it in a car, really . . . . So what I've got to do now, written it as a plan, I've got to write about each of them, have I?
Roz: Yes, well, I want to help you sort it out into paragraphs, because at the moment it's just thoughts organized into two columns. So that's our first go at planning. It's just gathering the ideas together. Now we'll have a go at the actual paragraph by paragraph . . . . Looks to me that in your introduction, you're going to be saying that you're pleased with your choice, aren't you? . . . Now, it looks to me as if there are enough advantages to divide up into two paragraphs, aren't there: so how would they divide up, I wonder?

SHAPE

* Is there any subject that you want to write about that this 'For and against' shape would be useful for?
* Before they got going on this one, Roz suggested another shape for an argument: trying to persuade somebody (a real or imaginary person) to do something or to agree with you.
Can you think of any more shapes for arguments?
Have you practised backing up an opinion with evidence, or trying to answer the opposite arguments?

PRACTISING

* To start with, your tutor (or a more experienced planner) may show and suggest shapes for your ideas as they come out.
Can you make sure this feels all right? Can you tell her if the shape in your mind is different from what she suggests?
* How do you move on to planning for yourself?

WORDS

* Transformer, aerial, frequencies . . . . When you know a lot about a subject, especially a technical subject, it brings in hard-to-spell words. You can't leave them out or get round them, so what will you do? Can you make a special 'dictionary' for this subject, if you want to use the words a lot?

CHOOSING

Many basic education centres or areas have a magazine. Sometimes they don't make any choices about what writing they put in: they print everything they get. Sometimes it's up to the tutors and organizers who put the magazine together to do the choosing. But in some places students are involved too.

You can also call this process 'editing'. I've put 'choosing' here, because I've used 'editing' later to mean detailed work on polishing a piece of writing.

In Calderdale, in West Yorkshire, they have a magazine group. It meets every week, with a tutor, like an ordinary class. They look at the writing that gets sent in from all the classes in the area. They try to do a magazine every term. But they still have to choose what goes in and what doesn't, because they have so much writing each time.

How do you choose? It isn't the same as saying a piece of writing is good or bad. All student readers know how much effort a student writer may have made, and what an achievement even a short first draft may be.

But when it comes to a magazine, you have a new person to think of – the unknown reader. The reader doesn't know the background, or the writer; she just wants to read something that puts its points over and is interesting. If you read what the Calderdale group say as they look over people's work, you will see how they think about what the unknown reader will want to read.

I've chosen bits from two discussions. This is the first piece they read:

THE BUG HUT

On Saturday afternoon, my mother used to take us to Brighouse and give us out pocket money. We used to go to 'Penny Denham's' to see what we could see for our coppers, and she used to take us into the market and there would be a sweet shop called Beavers where you could buy boiled sweets with our ration cards.

Then we'd go back of Brighouse Theatre – the twopenny rush. We'd stand at side of wall and there'd be a big man with a flat cap and one eye with a flap over and he'd keep us all in a line to stop us fighting.

Inside the man would say 'Budge up' and push more children on the seats. Then pictures would start and kids would shout. The serial would come on – everyone would shout and stamp their feet and every week it would finish just as it was getting exciting till next week. We'd run home playing cowboys and indians – riding our horses and shooting all the way home. We had roast beef and gravy, and stand pie for tea.
Leonard

Here is part of their discussion of it:

Jean: I'm just remembering.
Gillian: Remembering what, Jean?
Jean: The Saturday pictures.

A: We used to call the Savoy 'The Bug Hut'. It were terrible – a right scruffy old – right mucky one, wasn't it? Oh dear. And t'Ritz were the best. There's none now. There's none in Brighouse at all now. They're all Bingo – No, not one, we used to have three picture houses. One's a Bingo hall –

B: Two's a Bingo hall –

C: The other one's a dance place.

A: Oh yes, ballroom dancing, but it's also been a Sammy's, and they closed them down because of t'drinking laws and things like this . . . . It's too dear to go to t'cinema now.

B: I haven't been to pictures in five years . . . .

Gillian: Right, what about this one, then? Shall that go in or not?

Joe: Well it depends – in my opinion it depends on who's going to read this. I mean, that's all right for, will we say – I mean it doesn't mean a thing to Gary there, does It? It doesn't interest him.

Gillian: It's just for older people?

Joe: Oh, it's good, it's good for the likes of us. Even you, of course! But it wouldn't mean a thing to a lad like Gary.

Gillian: But isn't it nice to know what things used to be like?

Gary: Oh, we used to hang round street corners and all like that, we didn't go to t'flicks.

Gillian: Why not? Didn't they used to have Saturday morning flicks?

Gary: No.

Gillian: They'd stopped it by then?

Jean: Oh, yes, they stopped it years ago – really a long time ago.

Gillian: Did you like reading this – did you find it interesting?

Gary: No, not really.

Joe: That's what I'm saying. I don't think it will mean a lot to them. If my daughters were here, they wouldn't believe the things we used to do. I tell my lot, my youngest is 17 and she laughs at me. But I'll tell you one thing I say to them, 'We had a better time than you ever had'.

Gillian: So is it because you're not interested in how people used to live, that you don't like this piece?

Gary: We don't do it, we used not to do it, we used to hang around street corners when we were kids.

Gillian: So would you be more interested in reading a piece about hanging around on street corners?

Gary: Yes.

Gillian: Ah, yes: and you don't care about what other people used to do?

Gary: No.

Tina: I think it's sad, for me; you're just thinking of yourself, you must think of other people before you. There's a lot of kids think – they like to know what the world were before them. Like a piece of history, you know, memory.

Joe: Anyone see that today, they'd think we were round the blinking twist.

Tina: It's not everybody's cup of tea, is it? – to me, I'm sorry to say but I don't like read anything hanging round in the street.

Gillian: No, that sounds boring to me.

Gary: Ah, but we used to look at t'lasses when they walked by.

Gillian: Well, you were a bit older then, weren't you? This is a bit younger, before they were interested in girls. This is a problem, then. So – we put it in for the sake of the people that it does mean something to, and for the young people who are interested in us old ones, and what our lives used to be; and forget about these who aren't interested in us oldies?

A: This Penny Denham's, it was a really funny shop. It's Wells now, showroom in Brighouse, opposite the Civic Hall. You'd go in, the door was here and you'd go in, and then you'd go round there, and round another corner – all the way in, and it was right to the ceiling, and there were stacks of dinky cars, and little dolls, and goodness knows what – it was a marvellous place! We used to spend hours in there, I did!
Gillian: I wonder if we could get a picture of that? See if we could get a picture of Penny Denham's. And if not, you'd have to talk to an artist, and describe what it was like.

DECIDING

* 'The Bug Hut' went in the magazine. Do you agree with the decision? How would you explain the way they decided?
* Does it matter that Gary doesn't like it? Does every story have to please everyone?
* Should they have voted on it? (They began to do this in later meetings.)

THE STORY

* At the beginning and end of the discussion, they are not talking about the story itself so much as the memories that it brings back. Does this mean it's a good story? Or are they going off the point of the discussion?
* Is it a good story to read for people who haven't got the local knowledge?

WORDS

* What's a 'stand pie'?

For the second discussion, I won't print the story, because they decided not to put it in. This time, just look out for the arguments they are using.

Gillian: Do you want it to go in the magazine?
Tina: Little bit exciting, isn't it? Exciting – you know, camping and horse-riding, and so, for the weekend – the week.

Joe: I read this at home and I think it's good. I like it because it's short and sweet.

Gillian: Everybody agreed about that? Gary, you're looking doubtful.

Gary: It's the normal thing, I think . . . . What most people have to do . . . . It might be just my opinion, but I don't particularly like it at all.

Gillian: I suppose I've got the same sort of feelings as you, I think, about it. Like I would have liked him to say a bit more, to make it more exciting: like rock-climbing for the first time –

Tina: Yes, but it depends on what kind of person he is –

Gillian: I mean, what's it like, dangling on the end of a rope, what did he have to go through to do it? 'Cause it's just the facts, it's just what we did, that and the other – it's not saying what it was actually like to do it.

Tina: Yes, but you have to figure the lad, he might be timid, and he might be – not quick at really put down what he's thinking. For him it's really a bonanza, that week; and he can't explain hisself.

Gillian: I mean, do you think there's any way that you could –

Tina: He could have done more, put a bit more action in, but you don't know what kind of lad he is.

Gillian: You're thinking of what the piece meant to him, aren't you, when he wrote it?

Tina: Yes.

Gillian: – If he's not confident about writing, he would put just as little as possible.

Tina: Yes. Just as short as possible.

Gillian: But I think it's also, I think Joe's point is important, that the magazine needs to have a good variety of different lengths of pieces –

Joe: Yes.

Tina: Yes.

Gillian: So that there's plenty of short pieces in there, so that it looks attractive, so that it makes people pick it up and think, 'Oh, I could have a go at reading that'.

Joe: If I buy a magazine, the first thing I look for is a short piece. It encourages me if I read it; it'll make me say, 'Well, I'll have a go at a bigger one'.

Gillian: Right. So I'll put, 'It's good because it's short; but look at it again with all the other short pieces'. Yes? And our reservations are that – that it's bad because it's short! Well, it's not just because it's short . . . .

Gary: It wants more life, more excitement in it. I mean – rock climbing, it's dangerous, but it doesn't say it.

Gillian: But I think possibly it could be made more exciting if you had photos with it of something exciting happening.

* Why do they decide to leave it out?
* Do you think it's right to leave some pieces out? Do you think it's more important to encourage the writers or to make something good to read?
What line would you take if you were editing your own magazine?

PICTURES

In both discussions, they started thinking about pictures to go with a story.
Have you used pictures to add to anything you have written?
Do you prefer to read something that has pictures with it?
What can pictures add to a piece of writing?

CHANGES

* The magazine group sometimes write and ask the writers to change their pieces. What do you think they would write to the student who wrote the camping story?

DIFFERENT ENGLISH

James Lloyd was a student at Beauchamp Lodge in West London. He has written a book called *Working Away*, about leaving school, finding jobs and studying. When his book was reviewed in the ALBSU Newsletter, the reviewer said, among other things:

'There is no correction of grammar, which makes one feel that James is actually talking rather than writing. My regard for James as a person . . . was over-shadowed by concern about how the book would be used by other literacy schemes . . . . I only hope that it will not be used for formal exercises where students are asked to "correct grammar" and so on – James deserves more than that.'

I looked at the book to see what she meant. Here is a short passage from the beginning:

'I left school in Whitsun '76. After two months I went for interviews, eight interviews. I couldn't even spell my own address. People must have looked at me in interviews and thought, he ain't going to get nowhere in life. I could see it in their faces. They just used to look at me and say, terribly sorry.

Till one day I decided to go out looking for a job and hope for the best. So I went for a walk, supermarkets, shops and agencies. Everybody said there isn't any jobs.

So I went into a supermarket and asked to see the manager. The manager came and I asked him if he had a vacancy. So he spoke to one of the people at the counter and he took me into his office. Sat me down. He give me a form to fill in and I got a bit scared. So I come out with the truth.'

I thought this might be a good starting point for a discussion about the different kinds of English there are, and what we do about them when we start to write. James came back to meet a group at Beauchamp Lodge and we talked it over. First, James's book:

James: The way I wrote the book, first I spoke into a tape, then we typed it out and everything. But I spoke – you know, the way I'd speak, I would write, you know. And Geraldine says to me, do I want to change anything in the book itself – the words. And I said no, I want it the way I spoke it into the tape. I want it that way. Not for the benefit of me; it's just the way I felt; that's the way I want it, it's my book. My words. It's just the way I've been brought up. I've lived in London all my life, and it's just the way our community spoke.
Sue: If any of you were writing a book, would you want that kind of thing to be changed?
Ronald: No.
Elvira: No, that's how you think it . . . . Like, phrases and so, I don't see they should say anything about it, because *he* write that book, he put some phrase in it because he usually speak that phrase.
James: I think everybody's got their own expression, the way they write. I mean, I've read the papers and books and I've had to go back over to understand what the words are, you know? I mean, I wrote that, and I wrote the way I wanted to write it; and you get a book, an ordinary book, and read it; you think, 'Oh, what's he saying about this?' Everyone writes different.

Sue: Yes, and there's things about being clear, as well as about being posh, aren't there.
Ronald: What I find, educated people, I'm not talking about teachers, right? Educated people always find it difficult to respect ordinary people when them write, you know? The moment they start – 'Oh, that's no good, is it?'. They don't realize that we haven't got the background as they. We haven't got the education bit.
Chris: Yes, but I still think is just a style, man. Just like we have our style, they have their style; some people just come up with a posh style; but when you come down to it, is nothing.
James: If I go to Ireland on holiday, to see my relations over there, my voice has got to completely change. I've got to go into an Irish accent, just to speak to them. They cannot understand a word I say . . . . I've got to talk like they do . . . . I've got to listen to my uncle, my auntie's husband, very careful, but I can always understand what he says. You've got to *listen*.
Gwendolyn: Well, it's strange, I tell you something; I used to change a lot of jobs once upon a time, right, and everywhere you go to work, you have different friends – I started change up, you know, by talking like them. And every time I have a new friend, when I came home my husband would say, 'You must be have a new friend'. I would say, 'Why?' He say, 'Because you speaking different'. (Laughs)

Anyway, I was going once and I left this job – and I was speaking all right in this job, right? And I went to another job. When I went there, they start to laugh – 'What you play, you playing English?'. They all didn't like how I speak. And one day this woman say to me, 'Oh my dear, since you start to work at this place, you speaking so bad,' she said, 'and when you came here –'. I said, 'But I have to join them'. So it depends on your friends, and where you work it has a lot to do.
Sue: If you grow up with something a bit outside posh English, then you learn at least two languages by the time you grow up, and different variations in between. Whereas those of us that start off in the middle, with middle class English – that's all we've got, we've got nothing to fall back on!
Ronald: I understand that, Sue, but you must realize, we into a different country now. We have children who go to English school, and taught right to speak English. So therefore we as parents, we got to try and speak the way how they taught in school. Right? Because when they come home, they wouldn't understand you.
Chris: And another thing, people think that if you speak proper English, you very educated, you clever, right? If you speak any kind of – I mean, Irish or anything, or any other language, you stupid. That's it. I hear my sister say now to my mother, 'You stupid, 'cause you can't speak English'. You know? I say 'That's the proper way to say it, you know?'. Automatically people think you're stupid if you can't speak proper English, you're backward.
Sue: I think that's true; people think you can only say simple things unless you say it in posh English.
Chris: That's how they get all them politician man go up there and they speak all them funny ways. Oh yes, they great, but they don't know nothing just like you or me.
Elvira: They depend on someone else.
Chris: Yes! Like Maggie Thatcher and all of them, they don't know nothing. Everything they do, they have to read it from a paper. (Laughs)
Sue: And half the time they use words not to tell us anything, don't they? They don't use words to tell you things. They use words to conceal things from you.
Chris: Yes. They just confuse your brains.
Sue: Do you think there's some purposes where you have to try and sound like everybody else?

Elvira: Well, 'sound' – you know, because with this accent, you understand, you still wouldn't sound like somebody else.

Sue: Fine; but do you think this changes when it comes to writing?

Elvira: Well, very few people change. The Welsh I feel wouldn't change, and the Scottish, they wouldn't change. Because they have their different accent, and some words they really call shorter than the English. So it's still the same thing.

Robert: Yes, in some ways, but I'd say that if you were talking to the person, you'd perhaps feel a lot more of their accent, but if you were reading and writing you'd perhaps only catch a very small part and be able to work out by the end if they were Scottish or Jamaican.

Sue: Do you notice when you're reading something by somebody else what kind of English it is?

James: Yes. I notice. I've read pieces from people here, and I've noticed it has been a West Indian person who's wrote it, just by the way they put it down on paper.

Sue: But do you now see that as a problem, or just interesting?

James: No; it's just the way they speak.

Chris: You can still write, and you can still reach to their standard, but it's just that it's in your way, and it's something which is yours really.

Terry: The only problem – going back to ways of writing, ways of talking. A few months ago I had the option of changing my style, I was actually told, right, that the style of my writing was at a very low level. And the person who gave me bad marks for it, I actually couldn't understand what she was saying. And I said to myself, well I'd rather write the way I like, and I can understand myself, than reading someone's writing where they're using extremely complex words, words that I don't hear people actually use. That sort of writing, that formal stage, I would rather not use, because I don't come into contact daily with the people who actually use those words, and I rather write in a way that somebody else can understand what I've written, rather than pick up a piece of writing where I've got to open a big Oxford dictionary to find out what eight words is within three sentences.

Sue: I think that sometimes learning new words is important, because there are actually new meanings that come with them. There are things that you can't say in other ways. Yes? But sometimes it's true, that you could say things in ways that more people could understand. But that's a lot of work in itself. Once you've learned to write long words, it's harder work to write short words.

Terry: I do think, though, that people ought not change the way they speak or the way they write. But again, there's this problem, it's where you are and what you're doing.

Elvira: It depends on what you writing really. There are times when you got to put your best out, you understand?

Sue: You could learn 'writing English' as another variation that you could use for particular purposes. Like writing to the Social Security, or the tax people; I want them to think I know exactly what I'm doing. So writing is in a way something you hide behind –

Jane: And use.

Sue: And use, that's right. OK, if you want to learn that, learn it. But learn it as part of a range, and not the thing that you wipe out everything else you've ever done in order to be able to just stick to that one. You see? And that's how I've come down to feel that we should go about it.

Chris: Yes, I understand what you're saying there now; what you're trying to say is, depends on who you're writing to, and thing, sometimes you need to be a little bit –

Jane: Not to please them, but to get what you want.

That isn't the last word on this subject: I hope to get you thinking and arguing yourselves. The question we never did answer was 'What do we mean by good English?'. We did agree that there are difficult decisions to be made in the classroom:

Sue: Unfortunately, if all of us in this room agreed that all the different kinds of English we talk – London English, Yorkshire English, Irish English, Caribbean English – are all equal to each other, we still go out of this room and that's not agreed. Not everybody out there thinks that. And I think that's the difficulty for us teaching. How do you build up somebody's confidence that their language is perfectly OK and strong, and can say strong things, while at the same time not leaving them in a trap when somebody comes and judges it from a different viewpoint?

* What do you think?
* The people in this discussion are from London, Jamaica, Antigua, Grenada and Bedford. What language histories are there in your group?
Is there a 'different English' where you live? Or more than one?
* What do you want to do about it as you learn to read and write? If you wrote a book, how would you want it to come out?

WRITING TOGETHER

This section is all about working as a group. First there are a few points about what you can get out of working together; then we look at discussion, as something a group can do, and what you get out of it; and then we see how one group moved from discussion to one kind of 'writing together' – they made up a play.

You have met Rose before, in 'Catching the words': she had some clear ideas about using the tape recorder. This is what she said about working in a group:

'I find that we all sit together, and we read and we talk and we write, and it all right; one encourage the next one, because some of us is very slow to start write, some is slow to start to speak, some is slow to start to read – you know? So the one that quicker to start to write, he or she may stay for the last, and the one that cannot start fast, will start before. So you see, you pick up a bit here, you pick up a bit there. This group is really helpful.'

It sounds like a good group to be in. It sounds as if they want to see each other learn, as well as each one looking after her own learning.

Loleta, from Hackney, also says her group does 'a little talking, a little writing, a little reading'. She and Mary say a bit more about talk and discussion. They then go on to say something about talking as a way of preparing to write.

Sue: If you were trying to persuade a group that didn't do much discussion that it was a good idea, what would you say?
Loleta: I'd try and tell them how I benefit from talking. Sometimes rather than doing the writing or reading, we just sit and discuss things, and when I go home to do my homework, I remember things that we talk about more than if I just read it.
Sue: What would you say, Mary?
Mary: Yes, it's more interesting, what you're learning; because it's true, it's easier to read than it is to actually write something down, something that we've been talking about. So when you talk about things, it sticks more in your mind, the different points that have come up.
Sue: Do you think it ever helps you understand something that you've read, if you talk about it together? It does for me; if I read something hard, I want to talk about it to sort my ideas out.
Mary: Definitely; because sometimes, some words, if you don't talk about the word – I mean I didn't even know what 'apartheid' meant at one time, you know. So if it's explained to you and you talk about them, the different definitions of words, that helps you understand better what you're reading.
Sue: How about doing the play? Do you think it would have come out as good if you hadn't had the discussion first?
Loleta: No, I don't think so.
Sue: Why?
Loleta: You discuss the things and if things don't sound very good, you say something else, and round and about, and it comes out all right at the end.
Sue: So you see discussion as a way of trying an idea out, before you're sure of it?
Loleta: Yes.

Mary: When you talk about what you want to say, in that way it helps you to get a better understanding, and try to make things more realistic; because from what each other say, you know more about their experiences.

On the day they did the play, the group was Loleta, Mary, Chris, Jean, Carol and Icilda. They had a discussion about bringing up children, and how we punish them, and how we feel when this happens in public. It was a good discussion that went over a lot of points. They were preparing to make up a play about baby battering. Their way of writing was to take different parts in the play, turn the tape recorder on, and speak out.

I'm saving the play till last! This is what they said about how it was done.

Sue: How did you pick the subject for the play?
Chris: It's something that this group has talked about more than once, but I decided in the end. For instance, we'd been talking about –
Carol: Kids at school, and who should beat children, and things like that –
Chris: Yes, and that one about the woman who had her kids taken away because she's been to prison – there were quite a few things that led up to it. Whether or not women should be punished, really, I think we talk about that quite a lot.
Jean: And having Charlene in the group – her mother has left now, but she has been coming for nearly a year, and most Fridays she screamed all through the meeting,
Chris: I think most of us had a lot of sympathy for her mother.
Mary: And she wouldn't go to nobody else either.
Jean: – And Carol being pregnant –
Mary: – and how Carol's going to feel when she has hers –
Chris: I think we talk about children quite a lot.
Sue: So then how did you pick the parts?
Loleta: We just got dropped on us!
Jean: We did make one decision, didn't we? We made a decision about who should be the mother. We thought it would be easier if either Mary or me was the mother, because we weren't mothers.
Sue: Did you have to think hard about it, Mary, or did it just come out when someone talked to you?
Mary: No, I think it was like, what would I do, how would I manage? Because in a way, you do question yourself, your reactions and things. Not to say I would do that to a child, I really don't think that's me, but at the same time, it gets you into the situation and try to see how other people would feel.
Sue: It comes alive so well. And in the end you didn't have to make many changes?
Mary: No. Only the swearing.
Sue: Did it surprise you? Did anyone find themselves thinking, 'Oh, how did that come out of my mouth?'.
Carol: It was a bit like that with me when we looked at the typed version afterwards; I thought, 'My goodness, I really got into this'. But not at the time, no.
Sue: It just seemed obvious at the time?
Carol: Yes; and enjoyable. Good fun.

Here at last is the middle scene of the play. I hope that Hackney Reading Centre will have found a way of letting other people read all of it.

THE CAST:

Chris: the father
Murdina: cross examiner
Mary: the mother
Jean: the social worker
Carol: the neighbour
Icilda: the magistrate
Loleta: NSPCC inspector (not in this scene).

Chris: I wouldn't say the baby was deliberately hurt. I'd say that maybe my wife was a bit hard on the baby.
Murdina: Has she ever hit the baby in your presence?
Chris: Er . . . no, no. Never seen her hit the baby.
Murdina: So, did you have any reason to think she'd hit the baby?
Chris: No, no, none at all.
Murdina: So what is your excuse for the injuries?
Chris: Well . . . maybe the baby needed a good smack – I mean – I wasn't there, how would I know?
Murdina: You wouldn't be surprised to know that the baby had been hit?
Chris: Well, er . . . no, no, not really. I mean, I think kids need discipline.
Murdina: Mary, can we just come back to you a moment? The injuries that the baby received suggest that the child had been struck.
Mary: Struck?
Murdina: There were marks on the child that would fit with finger-marks.
Mary: I can't understand what you're talking about. I really don't know what you're talking about.
Murdina: The hospital report states that this child was hit and possibly pushed or thrown across the room and that is how she received the injuries.
Mary: How can they prove that? *How* can they prove that?
Murdina: The doctor who made this report has examined a large number of children who've been injured by their parents or by other people, and he says that the injuries to the child were consistent with an attack by another person.
Mary: How can he say that? I'm afraid you're mistaken.
Murdina: Were you with the child all the time that evening?
Mary: Well, of course I was with the child all the time!
Murdina: At what point, then, did you realise that the child was injured – and go next door to your neighbour?
Mary: Well, like I just said – I'm with the child all day on my own, and I was trying to cope with the child and – well – I'm sure you wouldn't know what to do, what to do with a child that cried all day long. What would you do with it?
Murdina: Have you spoken to anybody else apart from your neighbour, about the child's crying?
Mary: Yes, I've spoken to my social worker and she doesn't seem much of a help either.
Murdina: Very well. Can we call the social worker to the stand, please?
Now, how long have you been seeing Mary?
Jean: Since just after the child was born.
Murdina: And the child is now . . .?
Jean: A year.
Murdina: What was your opinion on Mary's state prior to the battering?
Jean: Um . . .
Carol: Hadn't been to see her for two weeks, had she, Mary? She hadn't been near you, had she?
Jean: The last time I saw Mary she was, she was quite upset.

Carol: When was it, eh? You never used to come round, did you?
Murdina: When was this?
Jean: Er . . . I'm just checking my notes . . . .
Murdina: Was it some time before the incident?
Jean: I have a very heavy case load. There have been cuts in my department. It was some time before the incident.
Icilda: Stop that!
Murdina: When did you last see her?
Jean: When I last saw Mary, it was probably somewhere in the region of three or four weeks . . . .
Carol: Yeh, it was a month, at *least* a month –
Jean: . . . prior to the battering. Anyway, the last time I saw Mary she was . . . she was trying to cope as best she could given the extremely difficult circumstances she was living in. She was very tired . . . um . . . the baby was crying a lot, and she was receiving little or no support from the husband.
Mary: Too right, too right.
Jean: She was very concerned about the baby – more about the baby than about her own state. There were no indications that anything like this could happen.
Murdina: Would you describe Mary as a good mother?
Jean: Yes, I would, I would.

THE VERDICT

* If you were the magistrate, what decision would you make?

DISCUSSION

* Does your group have discussions? What are the main things you get out of them?
* Do you think discussion is something you can learn to get better at? In what ways?
* If you learn one-to-one, can you make up for not having discussion with other students? How?

THE PLAY

* The group agreed with me that it was a help choosing a situation with a shape and rules, like a court-room. It helped them to know where the play was going.
But if you could try out any kind of situation –especially if you just want to try something out, and it doesn't matter if it isn't finished.
* How do you feel about doing work that doesn't reach a finished point? Does it always matter?
* Try acting out your play as well as making up the words.
* There is some more about plays in section C4, 'Escapes an changes'.

WRITING TOGETHER

* There are other ways of writing together. Have you tried any? You could try:
a joint story
a letter (see WFT year 8 no. 2)
a list where everyone has her own bit
an ABC (see section C5, 'Focus')
a joint statement (see section C3, 'Learning').

WORDS

* There is a special language of words about plays and the theatre. We used: cast, parts, scene.
* Have you seen a live play on the stage?

WRITING FOR YOUR OWN PURPOSES

Graham Langton had been going to classes for six years. He started when he moved to Bedford from Abingdon. This is what he says his writing was like when he started classes:

"I could put things down, but my spelling was the difficulty. Well, it stopped me from writing letters."

He also had problems with forms. He explains it like this:

"I was unemployed for so many months – about two years. Of course, I got fed up signing forms for a job application. You get to think, what the heck do you put on a form? Am I spelling it right, am I doing it right, sort of thing, and am I putting it right? How should I present myself?"

I went to talk to him about one particular kind of writing he does now. He writes reports, on classes and meetings, to help him understand and remember what is going on.

He has been a member of the *Write First Time* group since 1978. This is an extract from one of his reports of a meeting:

'We had quite a long discussion on the ILEA issue, and decided it would be some time in February 1984. We have got the new order forms for W.F.T. to send around centres, maybe with an article.

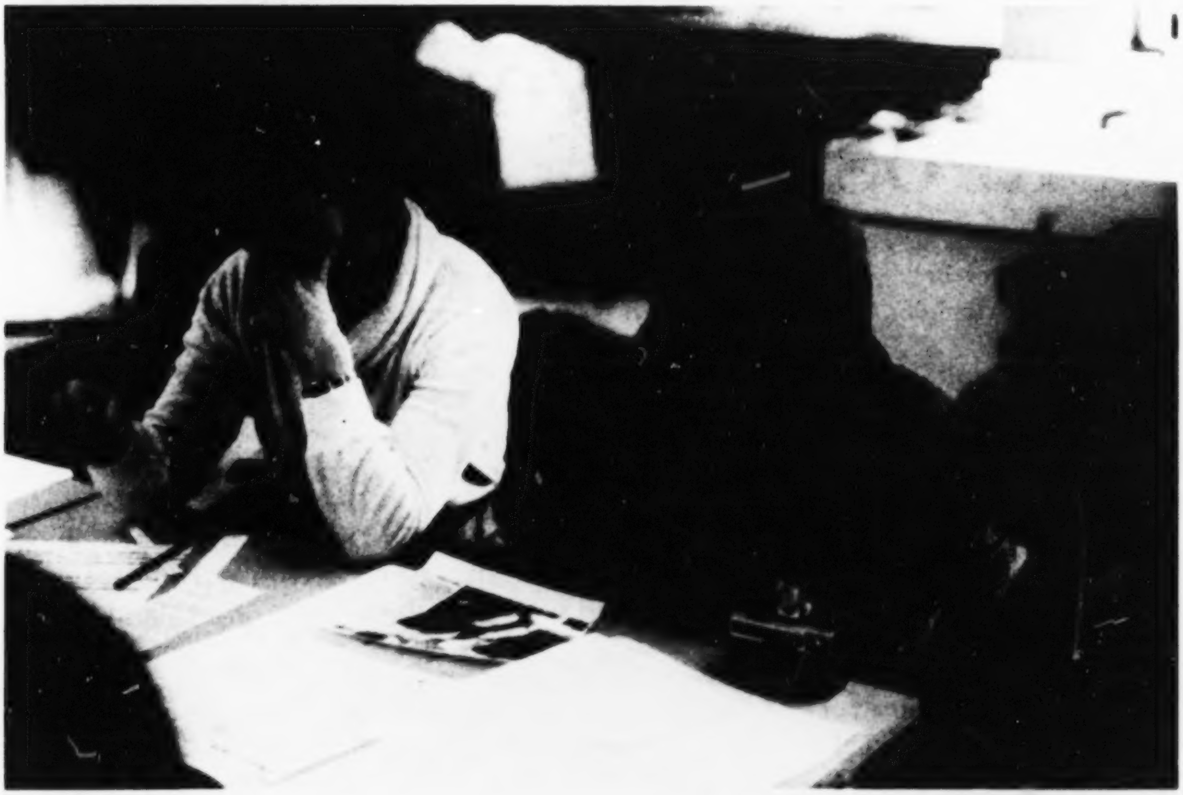
We went back to agenda item 8, on the need to put in more grant applications. They have decided the job of the fund-raiser should be discussed at the next few meetings. The role of the fund-raiser is an impossible one at the moment.

The prison issue has been held back at the moment. The next issue should be around Tyneside.
The summer school costs might go down. Maybe leave the video in the summer school. The feeling at the meeting was to reduce the no., instead of 80 people have a total of 50 going.

I would like to mention in my report that I think they spent a bit too long on the ILEA report. I do not think we covered all that was on the agenda.

We talked about this kind of writing and why he does it.

Sue: Can you remember how you got into doing that?
Graham: Mainly since – after we did *Tuesday Voices*, which the book came out from Bedford.
Sue: Yes, I remember that, nice book.
Graham: Did that, then more or less since I was involved in *Write First Time*, when I had my first story printed.
Sue: Right, you did an issue of the paper in Bedford, didn't you?



Graham: That's right, it goes back to that – that's how it sort of developed. When I went to the editorial meeting, and the layout, I thought I would like to write about it, so people – other tutors – if they wanted to read it, could see what happened.

Sue: So you always thought of it as something that might be for other people?

Graham: Yes.

Sue: And did that go to the class, was that something that then got read in class, or was it something you did on the side?

Graham: Something I did on the side.

Sue: So you weren't so worried at that stage about getting it corrected, or using it as material to have mistakes thrown up in?

Graham: No.

Sue: That's an important change, isn't it? And then you started coming to *Write First Time* meetings, and writing reports when you got home –

Graham: Yes – it's something of an achievement, that I've written something – I actually write it down during the day, when it actually happens.

Sue: You take notes as you go.

Graham: Yes.

Sue: Does that help you to follow the meetings, doing that?

Graham: Yes.

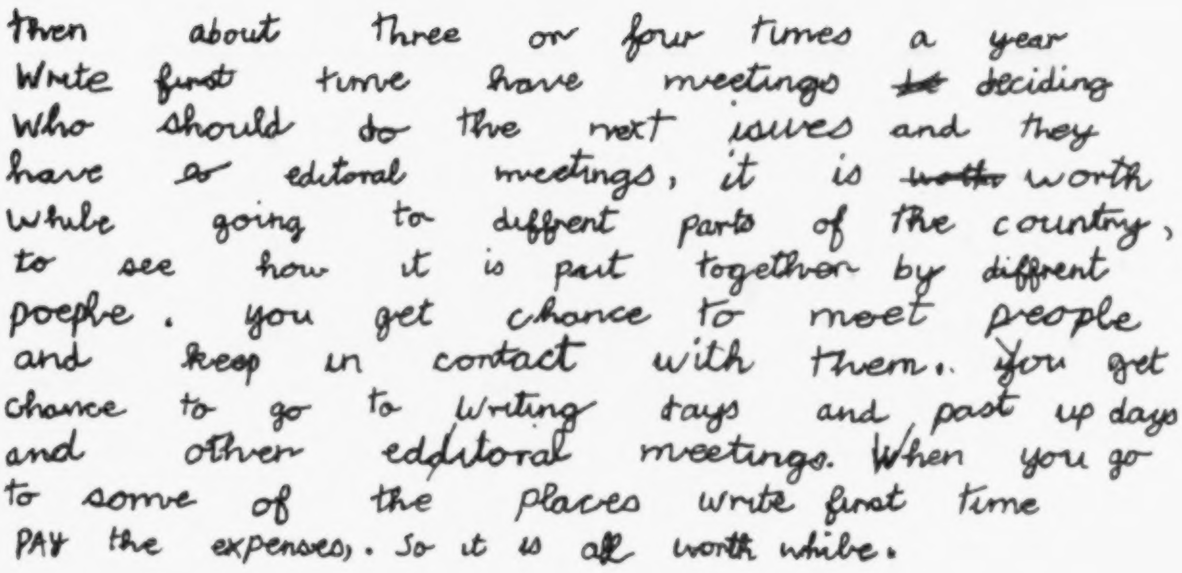
Sue: Mmm. Because you actually have to say to yourself, 'This is what happened' –

Graham: – Yes; so I can write it down.

Sue: How do you think of those, do you think of them as being writing for other people, or writing for yourself mainly?

Graham: I think of it as both. For myself, and if any tutor feels she wants to read it, and she's interested in doing a copy of *Write First Time* –

Sue: Right, so it's there as a record of what's happened, so that if anybody cared to know what it's like from the inside, they can – it would be available.



then about three or four times a year
Write first time have meetings ~~to~~ deciding
Who should do the next issues and they
have a editoral meetings, it is ~~wotth~~ worth
While going to diffrent parts of the country,
to see how it is pait together by diffrent
poephe. you get chance to meet people
and keep in contact with them.. You get
chance to go to Writing days and past up days
and other edditoral meetings. When you go
to some of the places write first time
PAY the expenses,. So it is all worth while.

Graham has started doing other reports too. Some are on things he's learning.

Graham: Well, to start, I'm doing a report – I go to a photography class. And I like to sort of extend from . . . . It's just an evening, every second Monday. And I just thought, I would like to sort of write a report on what in particular – in other words, what you've learned that night, about photography.
Sue: Right; so you do it session by session, do you?
Graham: Yes.
Sue: Do you find it helps you to remember what you've learned, if you do that?
Graham: Yes.
Sue: Have you ever written a diary of your literacy classes in the same way? You know, what I learned?
Graham: I'm starting to do a report on the evening class.

He has also written reports on local events (like a Barn Dance) for a community newspaper. This paper is produced by the South Side Community Association. Graham is now the Secretary of the Association.

Sue: That's quite an achievement, just offering yourself to do that. Did it feel like jumping in the deep end, when you did that? Or did you feel, 'OK, I can do that now'?
Graham: I think a bit of both, actually.
Sue: Does that mean you've got to write letters, write minutes –
Graham: I haven't actually done the minutes yet. At the moment, what I've been doing, I've got a minute book, and I've been writing it down and seeing – when the minutes are sent, seeing whether it coincides with what I've written.
Sue: Right, so you're doing a kind of shadow minutes –
Graham: Yes –
Sue: To see whether you're close enough to –
Graham: Yes.
Sue: All that's very ingenious. Did anyone ever suggest these things?
Graham: No, it was just my idea, to work it out.

EXPERIENCE

* Graham had a friendly organization, *Write First Time*, to practise in before he moved on to another organization. Is this important?
* Have you got an organization like that for students to join? Could you start one?
* Do you think it's a good idea to write for different situations, as well as for your class and your tutor, while you are learning?

WRITING AND LEARNING

* Graham says twice that writing things down helps him remember and understand. Do you keep notes of your classes? Is it something you would like to try?
* Graham talks mainly about writing down what he has learned. Can you also use writing to say what you aren't learning – what you aren't clear about? Can you use writing to help you ask questions, or ask for help?

PRIVATE WRITING

* This kind of writing is useful even if no-one else reads it. Graham is writing for his own purposes.
* How many uses is he putting writing to? Here are a few:
– note-taking
– summing up
– practising
– Any others?
* Are there some kinds of writing that you don't want anyone to mark or correct? Do you still want them to be read?
* Do you ever write anything that is for no-one at all but yourself? Do you think you will ever want to use writing in this way?

WORDS

* Graham talks about 'minutes' and the 'minute book'. This is part of the special language of formal meetings.
Do you know these specialized words? Do you understand them all? Do you find them annoying?
* What could you do in your class to make you more confident about them?

WRITING FOR OTHER PEOPLE

This interview with John Glynn sets out one person's progress through writing for a college craft course, personal writing, and student magazines, to doing a job where he has to do a wide range of writing – and his writing has to work. It has to raise money for the project, get the roof mended properly, or help sell a book.

The job is at Gatehouse Project in Manchester, where John works to encourage and publish students' writing, and where he shares the administrative jobs with the other workers. He is also active in the National Students' Association.

John's apprenticeship as a writer has been going on now for 10 years. Some of the steps he has taken are not there for other students to take in exactly the same way. But as you read this, you might want to think what you could do in your own situation to let these kinds of learning happen.

John: Well the reason I became a literacy student was, I got an apprenticeship in the building trade, and I was being sent to college one day a week – part of the job conditions. I knew there'd be exams at the end, I knew I wouldn't be able to cope with them, there was no question about that. I'd planned to go to classes, but – it's one of those things you never do until you're forced into it.

When I went for my interview, I spilt a cup of coffee on myself, I was that nervous. I think people think I'm exaggerating when I tell them that now.

I could read, I could read quite well. But my writing was virtually non-existent. It was partly through no confidence, and partly through lack of skill. And I wouldn't practise, because I couldn't. I couldn't write my own proper address, I had to carry that round, and I didn't have the confidence to spell things wrongly. And when I was started literacy classes I used to do my day release homework in them. So really I wasn't writing what I wanted, I was writing what other people wanted. Or what you had to write. So my writing had been basically practical; but I was still tense about it.

And then in summer, when the pressure was off, I used to write things of my own, and I started to relax with it. With writing. Because I used to write about things what's happened at work; and I felt relaxed and I felt I didn't need to have every word spelled correctly, as long as I could read it back and work on it.

Sue: Did anybody else read what you wrote at that stage?

John: Only the tutor. She'd say, 'Oh, why don't you get this typed up?' and I wouldn't – I just wouldn't. I still felt that if I'd done it, it's no good.

Sue: So the freer writing, the sort of writing that it doesn't matter what's happening to it, was the only place in which you could start making mistakes properly?

John: Yes. Because it was just for me, it weren't for anybody else. It wasn't going to get marked and it wasn't going to get published, or showed other people.

Sue: Right, so you need a kind of safe area, for a bit, that you can muck about in?

John: Yes.

Sue: So how do you get to take the things you've learned in that safe area out to the rest of the world and make them work? Do you think it happened to you before you started working at Gatehouse? Or do you think the job was a lot to do with it?

John: I'd passed my exams when I came to Gatehouse. So the actual need had gone. But I carried on – what I did, I got the exams I wanted, then I went on to a HNC, which I think I could have coped with, but I was also trying to work on magazines as well. We used to do our own centre magazine.

So I was trying to do both, doing the HNC and getting more involved in the magazines. I chose the magazines, because I was enjoying doing that. And in a way that was going outside, because I did a lot of linking, practical stuff, like drawings, and also editorials and things like that. That was different again for me; and that *was* being assessed; it was going from my desk and book, to being typed, and people saying, 'Here – I don't like that'. I had to cope with that, which I found difficult.

Sue: Was this just contributions to the magazine, or like you say, introductions and things like that?

John: A bit of both. Mostly – If I had a contribution I'd let other people decide if it went in; we always tried to get everybody choosing. I just kept quiet about that, and that didn't bother me if it went in or not. What did bother me was if I did an editorial or something, and then it was going outside, other people were saying 'Yes' or 'No' –

Sue: – And also in a sense you're being asked to speak for other people as well as yourself, aren't you?

John: Yes, because you always miss out or don't emphasize something which other people think is the most important; and – the thing I felt the most important about the magazine, not only is it reading material for other students, but encouraging students to come in. So that had to be perfect. You can't have two pages that say why the classes are good, it has to be simple, understandable. I was always trying to write an advert, if you like, to encourage people . . . . I could never do that, it was never good enough for me. So if somebody said it was bad, I'd say, 'I know, I know, I'm still working on it'. That's what has always kept me going, because always it had to be better, it had to be better, and I've never been satisfied with anything I've wrote.

Sue: When do you think you started seeing something you wrote as being a draft rather than a finished thing? Because it strikes me that's an important move, that actually a lot of people never make.
John: That's right, yes. I think that was when I was working at Gatehouse, when we used to do writing workshops. Somebody would write something, and I'd see that, and to me, that could be done better. I felt I was going back to people and saying, 'Look, you can do better than that, I know you can, you probably don't' – and I probably hadn't made the connection with myself. You can see it on other people –
Sue: That's right, I have a hunch it comes that way round. So Gatehouse had come into being, and you got a job with them. Let's just list the things you've had to write since then. I mean, obviously, letters, yes?
John: Yes. Ordinary letters, fund-raising letters, say business letters, because like writing to the company to say, 'This is what we want in the building'. So there's three sorts of letters there. And – funding applications; introductions to books; oh – yesterday, a reference for somebody. Reports: and – like when there's other groups like ourselves, and their funding's up for grabs – to justify them, what do you call it?
Sue: Sort of testimonials, letters of support. They're difficult, aren't they? A very formal thing.
John: I've written short plays, with other people, like on the video. We made up sketches, and acted them out – I loved it! But if somebody said, ' Write a play,' – I'd never do it.
Sue: But would you have said the same about writing grant applications, writing business letters –
John: Yes.
Sue: So how come? I mean, did you share that responsibility equally from the start, or was it something you kind of eased yourself into?
John: Eased myself into. Or forced myself into. Because I think I was – Gatehouse has always called itself a collective, but there were three of us students, and we were sheltered from a lot of the admin side; fair enough; but I felt, 'I'm working here, I don't want to be sheltered'. I was going around saying, 'Students are equal,' – well, you felt like you had to prove that as well. I wanted to do it, anyway, because I liked doing that. It's more of a success – if you write a play, and people like it, clap or something, it's always arbitrary whether it's a success. If you write an application for money, and you get the money – success! You did it.
Sue: What was the most difficult thing to learn about those jobs?
John: Trying to work out what people expected. Trying to work out how their minds work, putting it in the right style.
Sue: How do you think you learn it? Trial and error, reading other things?
John: A bit of both.
Sue: Did you discuss drafts with people as well, did you sort of work over drafts between you?
John: I used to be just a passenger, while other people did them; and I worked out myself what was successful, and what was right.
Sue: Right, so it was partly just using your reading, reading what other people did and seeing what happened to it.
John: Yes; when I did an introduction for a book, I just grabbed as many books with similar types of introduction, read through them, thought, 'That was bad – I'm not going to fall into that trap,' or 'That was good, I'll try and do something similar to that'. Instead of trying to do something totally unique. You can only build on what other people have done, or what you've done in the past. I've just become aware of that.

The thing that stands out in my mind is the introduction to *Where do we go from here*? I felt that was a very important book and it had to be right. I think I just said, 'I'm doing it!'. I felt there was so much had to go in.

Sue: What kind of support do people need when they're trying these things? Do you think it's useful to do things like pairing up on a job before you take one on by yourself?

John: Yes.

Sue: Definitely yes?

John: Somebody who's more experienced. I mean, I always ask a lot of questions; I don't feel afraid to ask stupid questions and look stupid: instead of, 'Oh god, they know better than me about that'. Not being scared, and accepting that nobody can do anything perfect first time off; and –like doing a report, offering the first draft out to people to look at and pull apart. And always remember that, one, it's the first draft, and two, it's the first time you've done that; and, OK, people say, 'You missed that out' –'All right,' and accept it.

Sue: Great. Is there anything else I ought to have asked you about, anything else you want to say?

John: Just to emphasize – the fear of being wrong, to put that second. And try and remember – it's like learning to drive; you didn't just get in your first time out and drive down the M1, you start off by stalling and making mistakes. Writing's no different.

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SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE

Students

rd Weekend

The 3rd weekend organ: ~y the N.S.A. will be used to evaluate the first two as a springboard for further development. We would have discussions on how the experience of the other two weekends have changed the attitudes and where students see themselves and their group developing.

INTRODUCTION

"Where do we go from here" suggests a starting point rather than a book that gives simple answers, which is very true. Like any complicated issue there are no simple easy answers. When literacy first became public in the mid-seventies a lot of figures were quoted on how many people could not read and write, but left blank, *"Who are these X million people and where are they?"* This book tells how 11 people survived as adult non-readers in a modern society that doesn't accept or tolerate not being able to read and write.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Nobody achieves 'being a good writer' once and for all. As long as we go on writing, achievements and set-backs and further ambitions are mixed up together. But in basic education, we spend so much time looking at difficulties that we can lose sight of what we do achieve. The four people whose words you find in this section spoke or wrote about where they have got to, each of them in different places and at different times during the last two years. Each of them has a different achievement to speak about; for each of them, it's unfinished and there is more to do; each of them speaks about something you could reasonably hope for and try for.

THEY ACCEPT IT, AND I WAS PLEASED OF IT

Jocelyn: I used to write my parents when I first came here, I used to write to my dad, send money for him and the kids (which I used to look after my children them). And I used to ask friends and relatives to write, and they sometime have time and next time they show me a different face; mind you, people not always pleased, you had to know the time for approach them. And I sit down and I write a letter one day, and I could never read a word of it. I said, 'To my dear father; hoping when this letter reach you it find you in the best of health,' and things and carry on, you know; and I fill the whole – you know these folding letter, air mail: I could only fill one part and then I go over to the other and then close. And I trying to read it, and I read a little bit and I trying to read, and I call my cousin and I say, 'Would you read this for me?'. And he say, 'That was good, you done it yourself?'. He say, 'Well now, from now on, you write your own letter! You see? – and then I just cut off communication.

I write dozens; when I say that, I write dozens. Sometimes my wife don't have any patience with me, she said, 'Well why, what's the use reading – when you get a letter you read and then you understand and you can't explain it to me?(. So these things get you unbalance, you know.

But I don't say that I give up, I start buying the newspaper, backing horses and etcetera when I used to gamble; I don't gamble now. And I still didn't go on – and if I did continue these things I think I'd be more mature. But it seems I drop all those things out. And I realize now that I need it.

You know, I go on to plane, you have to fill in the immigration form. You don't know people, you know, you feel embarrassed; you look nice and dressed there, and them sit in this first class section, no smoking and this thing – I did it, though, you know. Because I take it there and I say, 'I must have to do that, if I don't spell it right I have to do it'. Because I don't want to ask anybody. And they accept it, and I was pleased of it. Nobody didn't say this was right and this was wrong. We give them my name and address and place of – where you from; like I live here now, tell them and all that. Well, I said I want to do more, because I'm still not satisfied. You never know what you're going to face up to, you see.

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR YOURSELF

Roz: It's really a serious question for me, it's a question which affects the whole of education: why bother to learn to write anyway?

John: Why bother? Well, I used to think, why bother and why should you. Now I'm just beginning to realize – with doing pottery, I've really got into art, self-expression; it doesn't really matter to anybody else whether it looks a mess, or what you write is a mess. And I'm just coming to the strong conclusion, if I do it and I think it's fine – fantastic, it's great for me, that all it's got to do; and I think there must be a lot of art in writing . . . .

Roz: You're saying, before, you used to think there's no point in writing. Now you don't care what other people demand, but you yourself want to be able to do it.

John: That's it, yes . . . . You've got a mind and a pair of hands; they all laugh at me down there and I feel they're really stupid for laughing. If you let these hands feel a piece of clay, and if you get the feeling between you and it, and you just let 'em – don't say, 'I want to make this,' just do what they want to do, then you're bound to come up with something beautiful for yourself, and that's what I'm slowly learning . . . . I'm beginning to find out, instead of letting things cook up inside you, you can get so much out in self-expression.

Roz: Do you think writing could be like pottery in that way?

John: I think so, yes. I've got some friends, and they can write lovely poetry – but you can really understand, it's not this 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' sort of stuff; about feelings of when you're a child and you're stood on the bath mat and your mother's going to dry you, you know: 'I'm stuck there all naked but I'm so innocent'. And I think, yes, if I could write properly I'd get into that as well.

Roz: Haven't you tried that sort of thing yet?

John: No. I ain't got enough confidence in my writing. I mean, what, it's taken me 20 years practically to discover that I'm not a dummy, even though I was told at school . . . . People are so blind. They never look further than their noses . . . . what's good about, like going for a walk, is that you didn't just walk and look. You walked and felt and touched and tried to understand and become, like, one with what was there. You know it's like you go to the seaside in the middle of winter and you roll up your trousers and paddle in the sea, just because it's so nice. It can be pouring down with rain, but you still do it, and that's becoming something a lot bigger than you, and something more beautiful. And it can have amazing effects on the stones – I mean a stone's a stone, but after the sea's washed it and it's all smooth and it's in different shapes, and you think, well, look, it's just a round stone; but if you close your eyes and use your fingertips, you realise it isn't round, it goes up and down – and that's what has been totally lacking out of my life; I just didn't realize how beautiful things were. And that's all I want to do from now on. I want to appreciate things.

HOW STRONG I FELT

Linda: Well I went on a course, it was a week course at Barnsley. It was a residential course, and you had to write an essay; and the people who I was with didn't know anything about literacy. So they was very interested to hear what I did and how I felt and so forth, you know. So I said, 'Right, I'll write an essay on my feelings'; so that's what I did. And at the end of a week, you read it out. Now it's the first time I'd ever read anything out to anybody what I'd actually wrote. And when I finished actually writing it, 'course you proof-read it; and it was the first time I'd actually put it down on paper, what it felt like; and when I got to the bottom, finished, I cried myself. Because it's . . . I only realized how strong I felt about illiteracy when I wrote that.

Sue: How did they react to it, the people you read it to first?

Linda: Well, I was the last one to read out, 'cause I was very – you know, I weren't going to read it out, but they said, 'No, come on, you have to read it out'. But previously everybody else had commented on everybody, you know, and the tutor said, 'Well, you could have done a little bit better if you put it this way'. After I'd finished reading mine, nobody said a word. Oh dear me.

Sue: Did that make you feel worse?

Linda: Course I was still looking down at the page, and nobody said a thing. And I looked up, and everybody were –dumbfounded, really; and the tutor – you could tell he was very emotional over it. And I says, 'Oh dear me,' you know, and everybody started talking, and they said, 'It's really good, that,' and they all started clapping and that, you know, and I felt like shoving myself under the table.

Sue: I have a feeling that everyone needs to write about this whole thing of literacy . . . . The fact that you can write about it means you've moved on, doesn't it?

Linda: Yes, you've realized what you have done. And how you have improved.

Sue: Yes. I mean, this is a book about 'I was like this and I'm not any longer,' to me.

Linda: Yes.

Sue: It's very strong, I can see why they were moved,

Linda: And when I went back home I read it to my mother, and she cried. She said, 'I didn't realize how strong you felt about it'; and then the things what happened in school, and she didn't realize what was happening. It was beneficial to her as well . . . . And then I came back to the RSA, and they wanted to know what I'd been doing all week on Return to Study, and I presented this essay, and they took it away to see if they could pull it to pieces. And Sally came back and asked if they could publish it. I thought, 'Oh, no'. But they said, 'It's good, you know, it will help other people, and we'd use it within the classes,' and so forth; so that's the end product.

MY AMBITION ACHIEVED

I have taken part in writing two books in the space of my three years at Eden Grove Women's Literacy Group. I have been coming to day classes for a long time now. It means a lot to my life in several different ways. I am more highly thought of amongst my family, at work and amongst my friends. I myself am pleased with myself to have something to look forward to. It is helping to develop my intelligence as I am a person who has suffered from much stress. My name is printed in books, my writing comes out in the Islington Gutter Press and other magazines. I got a chance to go to France. We went as a group and I enjoyed it greatly and achieved it through my own work.

I often sit and look at the television and see how many famous coloured people there are on it. There are not many I see who have written books or taken part in publishing. Now realizing that we have already been paid out by Channel 4 for our second book that means my articles will soon be published. Being a mother of six and a grandmother of four, I personally think I am doing myself good.

In the future to come, if God spare my life, I hope to sit among my family and see my own books read and televised. Also I mean to say I have achieved one of my ambitions that was hidden away after being through some hard struggle in life.

Winny.
(Reprinted from *Our lives: working women.* Eden Grove Women's Writing Group 1984.)

YOU DO ENGLISH EVERY DAY

INTRODUCTION

In this section I want to suggest that you, the student, are good at English.

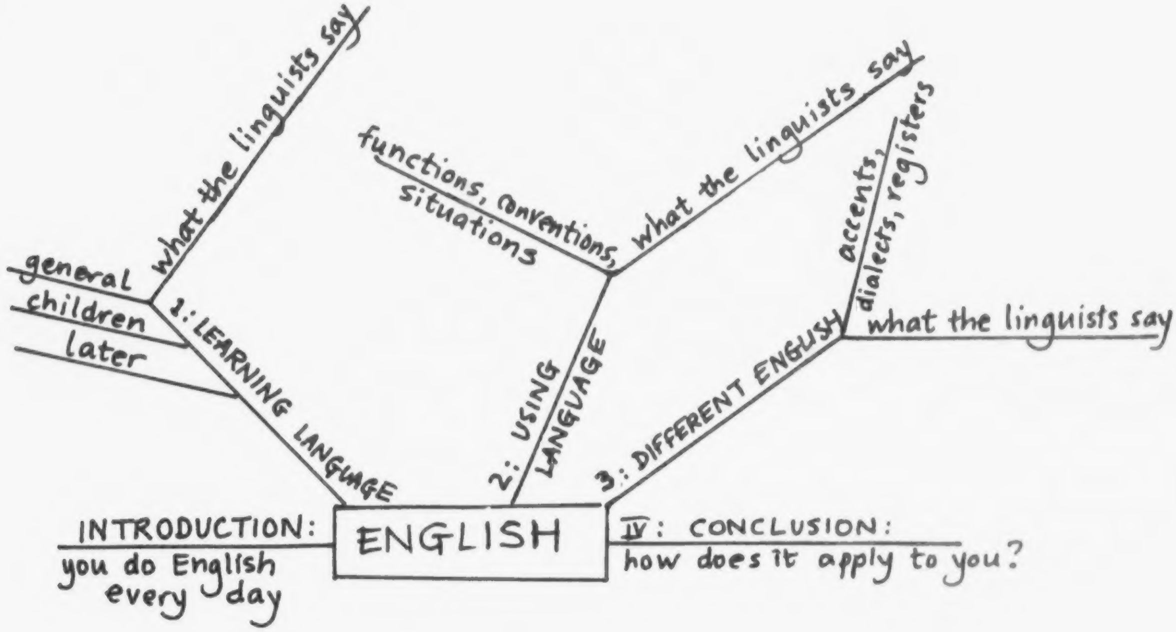
How can I say this without knowing you? It must be true, because you get by, every day, in a wide variety of situations, by using spoken English.

That is not to say you have nothing to learn! But you have learned so much already. You learned a lot of it when you were a child, and your adult life has taught you even more. The main strength you bring to learning about English on paper is what you know already about spoken language.

You do English every day. Most of the time, you do it with success.

If English isn't your first language, you still know a lot about language, and you can bring it over to learning about English on paper. To keep the section simple, I have written it about English; but please make any changes that bring your own language or languages into the discussion.

This is the first of the longer sections of this pack. For each of the longer sections, I've done a map of the contents, as I explained in the Introduction. It seems a clearer way of showing the structure than just a list of headings. Here is the map of this section:


ENGLISH
INTRODUCTION: you do English every day
1: LEARNING LANGUAGE
general
children
later
what the linguists say
2: USING LANGUAGE
functions, conventions, situations
what the linguists say
3: DIFFERENT ENGLISH
accents, dialects, registers
what the linguists say
IV: CONCLUSION: how does it apply to you?

As you see, each part has some points that I've called, 'What the linguists say'. Linguists are people who study language. They don't all agree with each other, but one of them drew up a list of points that he got a large number of linguists to agree with. I have adapted these points from that list (see 'Further reading').

Just because it's their job to study language, you don't have to agree with them. But what they say is based on study. It isn't just an opinion. Some of what they say may surprise you.

Take this section slowly or fast, as you like. It may be new ground for many tutors, too. We haven't all done any formal study of language, and we may be starting from all sorts of different ideas. We will be going into this as learners together.

Some of the study ideas here you could spend just part of a lesson on. Some of them would take a long time to think out and do properly. If you just want to have a general discussion, that's fine; but I don't think you will stop at just one discussion. With any luck, the ideas you raise will come round to be thought about again.

You may find it useful to tape record your discussions. It will help you to pick up later on things that you have all said.

1 LEARNING LANGUAGE

A. GENERAL POINTS.

How do we learn our language?
By what age have we learned most of it?
What we learn after that – do we learn it by study; by example; by trying things out; by getting into new situations?
Do we know much about our language? What kinds of things do we know? Things we can explain to other people, or things that let us use language successfully? Which is more useful to know?

You could talk about these questions as a group. If you agree on some answers, write them down.

B. CHILDREN LEARNING.

How do children talk while they are learning? Do they follow rules of language? Do they make up and try out rules?

You could tape record your own children, or ask if you can visit a local nursery. Or you can find children's talk written down in some books
Do adults talk differently to children from how they talk to other adults? What are the differences?
How important is it to listen to a lot of talk while you learn to talk?
Do all children learn as much, or the same things, when they are learning to talk? If not, what makes the differences between some children and others?

Some of you may know a lot about one special problem of learning language: that is, being hard of hearing. Years ago, many children went through school without anyone finding out that they were hard of hearing. (It still happens sometimes.) How does this affect learning to talk, listen, read and write? What idea of language do profoundly deaf people get?

C. LEARNING LATER.

Have you learned a second language? When and how? Was it different from learning your first language?

Have you had to learn to talk in a different way since you grew up? Why? What was different about how you had to talk? How did you learn?

WHAT THE LINGUISTS SAY.

– Children learn to talk mainly from the talk of older people. They don't get taught; they pick it up. They are sometimes corrected here and there. They don't always copy, they invent things as well. By school age, they learn from each other.

– They don't talk rubbish; they talk from rules, very early on. They are trying out the rules, so they don't always work things out right. They can't explain the rules but they can use them.

– By the time they go to school, they already use different kinds of talk in different situations, and for different needs.

– They learn different kinds of talk, not just from hearing them being used, but from wanting to use them themselves. Listening isn't enough.

– Many people never use all the kinds of talk they hear. They stick to the way they talk, even if it is not well thought of, and even if they don't think well of it themselves.

– We learn a wider range of talk by getting the chance to practise, not by learning rules about how we should talk.

– If we speak a language well enough to manage, we know a lot about it. But most of what we know, we can only use, and not explain.

Does this surprise you?
Does it make sense?
Is it useful to realise that you know a lot about how your language works?

The linguists suggest that knowing by doing is more important than knowing rules. Is this true for learning to read and write?

2 USING LANGUAGE

A lot of what we do every day depends on language: on speaking, listening, and, as far as we can, reading and writing.

See if you can describe what you and the people you talk and listen to are doing with language. These are some of the functions I thought of:
making contact with other people
encouraging and cheering people up
giving or getting information
giving or getting orders
persuading
thinking aloud
larking about
teaching and learning

You'll think of plenty more, if you work together.

You could do a time-table of a day, and put in the different things you do with language.

Think of special uses that don't come up every day, and add them to the list.

If you look at your list again, you'll see how much depends on where you are and who you are with. Do you talk different ways with different people, or in different situations?
Do you talk differently on the telephone?

Are there any situations where you are afraid or not sure about how to talk? What are they? Ask other people too

Some people are afraid of:
interviews
being alone with a boy or girl friend
telling the doctor what's wrong with them
going to a new place
meetings
and so on.

Why do these situations make you afraid? Could you practise? Could your group or your tutor help you practise?

Are there situations where one person in a conversation has more power than the other person or people? Think of some examples. How does this affect how they all talk and listen?

WHAT THE LINGUISTS SAY

– Everyone needs to use different kinds of talk in different situations. We all learn to do this.
– We learn how to do it from the different groups we are in, and from what sort of situation we think it is.
– Different situations have different conventions about talk: what is OK in one situation may not be OK in another. This may mean the words you choose, ways of addressing people, tones of voice, and so on.
– Most of the time we go along with this, but we can choose to do one kind of talk in a different kind of situation.
– Most people are better at some functions of talk than at others. The way you get better is by having a chance to practise the different functions

Any surprises?
Did you think you did so many things with language?

In this part, I've used the words 'function' and 'convention'. Do you understand how I'm using them and what they mean? Talk it over.
Are the ideas of functions and conventions useful when we think about reading and writing?

3 DIFFERENT KINDS OF LANGUAGE

We realized by the end of the last part that we all talk in different ways at different times.

There are differences and differences. Some we take in our stride. Others can seem very important. You've had a chance to read about a group talking about this, in section A9 'Different English'. Differences in language can upset people, or make them feel scared, or angry. Some people feel that some differences are too much – that to talk in such or such a way is 'not English'.

Some people move all the time between two or more languages. All of us move all the time between different kinds of language.

There are scientific ways of studying these differences. I don't think we can do that with the time we have. What we can do is build up an idea of what a rich variety there is of ways of talking and using language. And we can think about why it matters so much to get it 'right'. There are a lot of ideas and suggestions here. Don't do them all at once; choose where to start and take as much time as you want on any one idea.

To start with: can you find descriptions for all the different kinds of talk you hear and use?

It isn't easy. There's more than one way of looking at differences. More than one word might fit one kind of talk

Here are some words that might be useful. Sort out meanings together if you don't know them. They are in different lists because they are different kinds of difference!

Slang
dialect
register
accent
tone of voice
code
jargon

joke
story
debate
speech
interview
law or rule

preaching
lecturing
praying
rapping
inventing
teasing
swearing
instructing
chatting up
quarrelling
lying

formal
informal
conversational
business
family
legal
standard
pompous
ordinary
friendly
intimate
bossy
posh
working-class
local
. . . and lots more: collect them.

Some of these seem to me to be functions. Some are conventions. Some are to do with situations. And some are ways of judging people by how they talk. (Do you know the word 'register'? It's used for a style of language that suits a particular setting: for example, formal or slangy. I'll use it again later.)

Are some of these kinds of language 'good' and some 'bad'? Which ones? What do we mean by that?

Are some of them more likely to turn up in writing than in talk? Are some more likely to turn up in talk than in writing?

Are there some kinds of talk you don't understand? Which ones, and why? Do you think you could learn to understand them?

Are there some kinds of talk you don't use? Which ones, and why? Can you imitate them, even if you don't use them?

Do you think of some kinds of talk as belonging more to men or to women? Which ones, and why? Can you think of a way of checking if you're right?

Has anyone ever tried to change the way you talk? Who? When? Why?

You could do a life story of how you have learned and used your language, or languages.

You could ask someone who uses more than one language all the time, about how she uses them and in what situations.

WHAT THE LINGUISTS SAY

– Everyone, in all societies, uses different kinds of talk in different situations.

– The different kinds can actually be different languages, or dialects, or registers.

– All kinds, even very informal talk, are 'real languages'. They have their own rules, and their own appropriate words.

– Some kinds are thought of as being better than others. This is because of who uses them, and in what situations.

– Accents make no difference to the meaning or structure of how someone talks.

– Kinds of speech are connected with groups of people we belong to. That is why most of us don't like changing how we talk.

– The 'standard' accent is no closer to how we spell English than any other accent. No accent makes it easier or harder to learn spelling.

– Writing uses some kinds of language that don't often turn up in talk, as well as some kinds that do. Some kinds of talk don't often turn up in writing. (Though of course, any talk can be written down.)

CONCLUSIONS

Language is a big subject, and I feel very cheeky trying to set even a few parts of it down in such a small space. It seemed worth while to try, for two reasons. The first is that many students have a low opinion of their skills with language, and this should be changed if it isn't true. The other is that the ideas about language and learning that I sketch out in this section lie underneath a lot of the rest of what I have written. In any case, if I have done the job badly, it may encourage someone else to do it better.

But even if you agree with the ideas in this section, what does it mean for you? What does it mean for learning and teaching? These are some points you might consider.

* It looks as if improving your English may come from a variety of experience and a variety of practice, more than from rules.
Are there new experiences with language that you want?
What do you want to practise?

* It looks as if what you know about talking English can help you do things right when you write English.
– You know how to sort your meaning out – not always at the first go.
– You know how to find words you use, and how to try words you recognize but don't often use.
– You know about choosing the right dialect, and register, and tone.
– You can make proper sentences.
You do these things all the time when you talk. How can we make sure you still know you can do them when you try to write?
Are there kinds of talk you could practise more, to help you with kinds of writing?

* You might want to learn more about the history of English, and how it came to be spoken and written in the various ways that it is. It hasn't always been the same, and it changes all the time.
Would your group like to do a short course on this?

* It looks as if standard English is something you can choose to use because of what other people will think, and not something that is better in every way. You might also choose not to use it all the time, even for writing. Using the dialect, or language, that you grew up with might make you feel stronger or more sure of yourself in some situations.
What do you want to use standard English for? How can your group and your tutor help you?
Do you want to write some things without bothering about standard English? Do you want to spell them differently from standard English? How can your group and your tutor help you?

WHAT'S THE TUTOR DOING?

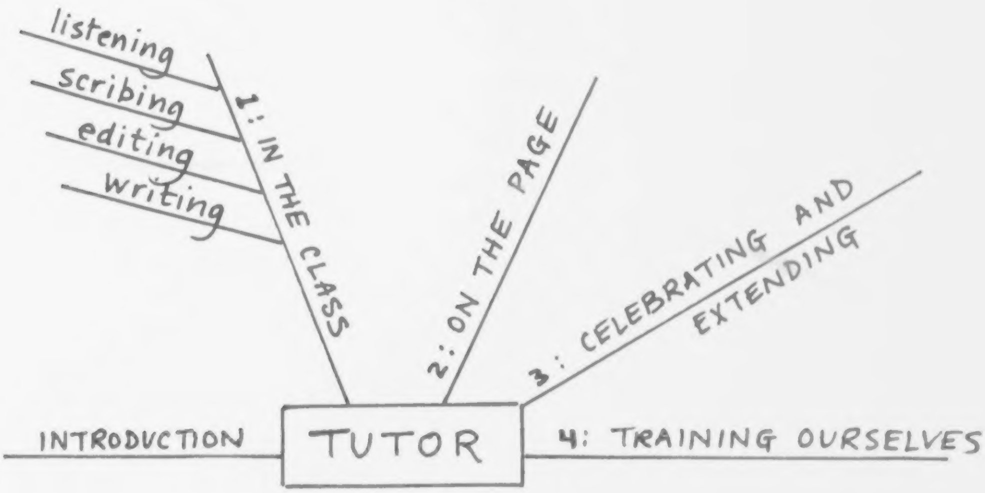
INTRODUCTION

Up till now, I have been writing for those who teach and those who learn at the same time. I have been giving you examples of what other people have done, and suggesting that anyone in a learning group can take responsibility for trying out an idea or starting a discussion.

But it would be a cheat to deny the fact that where adult learning is organized as a formal class, there is not an equal relationship between tutor and student. One gets paid, the other pays, in many places. Even if the tutor is a volunteer and the student does not pay, they have made a contract on different terms. One is responsible for doing what she can to help the other make progress. It is a two-sided relationship, and the student has to work too; but the student is not responsible for making it work for her tutor, or for her tutor learning from the experience.

So it's worth spending some time asking what are the special roles of the tutor. But I do not think that this is for tutors' eyes only. Students can and do reflect on and judge what their tutors do. It makes sense to bring them in openly on the debate about what tutors can do to help students develop their writing. For this section, though, 'we' means 'we, the tutors'.

It isn't a complete guide; for example, I haven't dealt with the balance between writing and everything else you do in a class. Here is a map of the section.



1 IN THE CLASS

LISTENING

A lot of thoughts disappear because nobody is listening. If you are used to thinking that what you say isn't up to much, it only proves you right if nobody listens.

The tutor needs to be a listener, with a specialized kind of concentration. She also needs to organize the group to listen to each other. Emerging writing needs listeners who are accepting, active, unselfish and critical.

Accepting, in the first place because the student often knows what she is talking about, and may well know it better than the tutor. This is easier to see when it's technical knowledge we don't share – of a work process, or CB radio, or herbal medicine. But there may also be differences over social knowledge and understanding. Our class and race background is often different. What we 'know' can cut across what the student 'knows'. We have to allow her knowledge to be real; not because we are doing her a favour, but because it *is* real.

In the second place, accepting of what is unsure and muddled. Everyone learning (everyone thinking) gropes uncertainly for meaning sometimes, and gets confused. The listener has to feel for the sense that is there, and help it take shape.

Lastly, accepting the language of the student. There are discussions about this in other places; here I just want to put it in terms of timing. You may decide together that you want to work towards formally 'correct' English. But if you constantly correct when you are listening, the speaker will feel you aren't listening to the meaning.

An active listener, because we are listening to reflect back to the speaker what she says. So active listening includes asking questions, asking for clarification, repeating points to check if that is what the speaker meant. Fellow students make excellent active listeners, once we have established that there's a place for this kind of exchange.

We can actively make notes, too, so that points are there to be looked at again. If we use writing as we go, students learn what writing is good for.

An active listener can help the speaker feel the weight and shape of what she has to say; she can help talk become a warm-up or first draft for writing, rather than just words that fly away on the wind.

An unselfish listener, because it's her job. A group of students will learn to be better listeners for each other, and get a lot out of it as they do so. It may be something we should practise more deliberately. But in the first place, and in the last resort, it's the tutor's job to listen. She needs to put something of herself into the talk as well, to be really there. But if someone has to set her own problems and thoughts aside and make room for someone else's, then it's the tutor who does so.

A critical listener, because what goes on in the classroom isn't finished, it's developing. Our wider experience of language and learning gives us the chance to see what it might develop into. Students may have greater experience and wisdom in many matters, but in the nature of things, we have more experience of the uses of written language. This is our main qualification for being tutors: we have models of the uses of written language that we can offer to our students to adopt if they find them useful.

In all of these functions, what the tutor does is a rehearsal. She prepares first for what the group can do for each other. There's a lot to learn from work in schools with pairs and small groups, working out understanding on their own, and from the idea of 'student response groups' in writing classes. Eventually, a student will do these things for herself (though she may still prefer to refer to and use a group). Regardless of skill, a student can build the habit of being an accepting, active, unselfish, critical listener/reader of her own work.

SCRIBING

Is that a word in current use? We need it, to cover all the functions where the words are in the student's mouth and the pen is in the tutor's hand. It can be letter writing, where the attention is purely on getting it down; it can be 'language experience' work, like in section A1, where there is a to-and-fro between meaning and the process of writing it down; it can be note-taking for something that will be worked on later by the student.

It can perhaps be extended to those times when we take a rough handwritten text, with perhaps two words in three spelt at a guess, and turn it into a neat, paragraphed and punctuated typescript.

Tutors spend quite a lot of time servicing students' writing in this way. It isn't a mechanical function, though. It needs some of the commitment and judgement that I've suggested above, about listening. We won't scribe well if we don't see the sense of what we're writing: we'll risk writing nonsense, or our meaning instead of what the student meant.

We need to develop our skill at holding spoken words exactly in our head while we write them down.

We need to be open all the time with the speaker about what we're doing with her words; to rely as little as possible on private codes for rearrangements we plan to make; to show the processes and keep the student in control.

We also need judgement about when to turn something into a teaching and learning opportunity in a specific way, and when to get on with the job in hand. I say 'in a specific way' because even when we haven't picked out a teaching point, we're teaching: how to construct meaning, and make sense of a message you want to send. If we can share this way of seeing things, it may help our students as well as us to be less anxious when we don't check all the spelling and punctuation points straight away. Students will learn the other agenda if we ourselves are clear about it and can explain it.

EDITING

Editing starts when there is something on the page. Is the first draft OK as it is, with few corrections? It may well be. It may also be all that can get done, at least for now. It takes a lot of concentration to get a story told once, and, as I would be the first to agree, re-writing can be hell. We need to balance the habit of seeing writing as drafts, against the student's resources at the time – and her aims for that particular piece.

If it's an ambitious piece, or if it's aimed at a particular reader who will make particular demands – or even at the unknown reader, with her unknown demands – then an experienced reader can help edit.

We may want to suggest rearrangement, for a clearer story or argument; cutting out repetitions; ways of getting the emphasis where it's wanted; what needs elaborating and what could take up less space. We may need to introduce new skills, like paragraphing, linking or combining sentences, and summary. What's important is that we share these processes as much as possible, including sharing the names we give them.

Some editing techniques are simple to learn, like cutting up and rearranging (though this demands quickness at reading or recognition). Others are more to do with models of shape or eloquence that we have learned from experience. In either case, we should do it together as much as possible. If class time won't permit, and we have to do the servicing at home, we do need to work at making it clear what changes we have suggested and why.

Editing with a student is, again, rehearsing what she will learn to do for herself.

WRITING

Should tutors write in a writing class? Should they share their writing with students when the group reads back or pins work up? I'm sure the answer is yes, though there are a few things to overcome.

It's hard to find the time. If you're scribing for one or two people, feeding spellings to one or two more, and maybe encouraging someone over a stuck place by drawing out of her what might come next, you won't have a lot of time to go off and compose your own piece.

And when you do, you'll probably do it with unnatural speed, which can be depressing in itself for people who are aware how slowly they write.

All the same, we should write when we can, and read our work out too. First, because many of us have blocks about writing – not as acute, perhaps, as some students, but not so different either. It's no good being a swimming coach if you won't dip your toes in. We need to show students that we cross out, make false starts, get stuck, feel dissatisfied, as well as sometimes showing them how to solve a problem of shape or tone.

We need to understand ourselves both the pains and the satisfactions of struggling with meaning. We also need to be sure from our own experience that struggles go on even when you can spell and punctuate with ease. We can't hope to set up a writing curriculum if we still believe that the only obstacles to clear expression are the mechanical ones, or if we believe that the only reason for muddled expression is muddled thinking (which may or may not be curable). Facing what happens when we try to get our own meaning right is the best counter to either of these positions. It takes us right back to the work of composition that comes before the work of transcription.

We need to take the same risks our students take, and find the same rewards in other people's reception of what we have managed to say. We also need, I think, to explore that particular territory of personal writing which many of us have left far behind. Is the astute writer of business letters or work reports someone who has put away these childish things? And is that the goal we should hold out for our students? In that way, we can set aside the questions about saying what is true for us, and how that connects with the social forms of writing we become used to. But are they questions to set aside, or are they life-long questions?

I have learned about writing by writing for and with others. I do hold back some of what I write, just as I have suggested the unselfish listener must hold back. But one of my goals is that we should be able to work together as a group in which I need not hold back.

2 ON THE PAGE

What the student takes away from our response to her work is what we write on the page.

'Marking', as many people recall it from school, has a bad name. It means the red pencil seeking out errors. It means putting work into something and getting it back as a mass of corrections, or else with a phrase or a tick or a grade at the bottom. 'Marking' belongs to the kind of writing we're trying to avoid: write something to show me your mistakes, tell me what you have learned from me so I can tell you where you're wrong.

If we're concentrating on composition, if we're looking at writing as communication, how should we mark? I should say at once that I do believe that spellings, punctuation problems and problems of organization need to be noticed. The question is, how to make the notice effective, and how to balance this with marking that supports and points to the other kinds of work that go into a piece of writing.

I had intended to work through examples, but they need more space. Instead, I'll offer some principles: your agreement or disagreement with them and their application in your working situation are things that tutors and students can work out together.

What we write on the page should be responsive; positive; truthful; related to the working situation; related to teaching; working to an agreed code; extending; useful to read independently later. I'll work through these points.

If someone talks to us, we don't criticize, we respond. We don't necessarily welcome or agree with what's said, but we signal what impact it has had on us. Writing, as communication, needs to be responded to as well. But a tutor isn't half of a conversation; she's there to concentrate on what the student says and how. Since we can usually assume too little confidence rather than too much, we need to say what has got across to us. You'll remember the challenge of the bad speller: 'Bet you can't read that'. We have to prove we can read and understand.

But positive comments need to be truthful, not flattering; and truth may include disagreement or rejection of points made. Sometimes to be positive at all, we engage with what lies behind the words on the page, rather than the scanty words that are there; but we do this with the aim of showing the writer that what lies behind could be brought through.

How this is done depends, obviously, on the working situation. Much 'marking' is done by talk. Either it's done as work is in progress, with perhaps some interventions on the page as well: a key spelling supplied, an omission mark as a suggestion for expanding later, bracketing something that has come in out of place. Or the talk goes on as we read a completed draft together. If we are well enough staffed and working closely together, we may not feel that much needs to go on the page at all. If, on the other hand, we have less class time per student, and tend to take scripts away to read at home, the pressure is to write more. Perhaps in either situation we should lean against the grain: the one-to-one student still needs a record of responses and suggestions to look at later, and the large group student still needs the live reaction – from other students, if the tutor can't do it?

Marking clearly needs to be related to past and future teaching. Even with marking for correctness, we respond differently to persistent errors on points we think the writer is aware of, ambitious new errors, or confusions that grow from part- learning or misapplying hard-won learning. Most of us surely mark selectively, with an eye to how much the writer can act on. We also need to use a code the student can read. If we underline a spelling mistake, what do we expect to happen? If we don't mark something, is it necessarily right? If we write 'tenses' in the margin, is it related to past discussion and proposals for work? Do we want to code differently our marking of 'exercise' work and of free writing, where communication is the main aim? Does the student feel 'Good' has a known value, or no value? Are our responsive comments readable (and I mean handwriting as well as language) and stimulating? Do we want to suggest a grade of any kind, even related to the writer's own previous work? Of we don't comment, is this read as rejection? We won't know any of this unless we make marking a running topic of discussion with students.

We should, where possible, be making pointers for development beyond first-draft stage, even if it's open between us that re-drafting won't always happen. It's up to us to show, from our wider experience, what a piece of writing could be as well as what it is.

We should remember that one reason to write on a student's work is that writing lasts. If we encourage, as we surely do, a file of old work as a resource and a measure of the writer's progress, then some of our response should be on file as well. The warmth of the reaction on the day –particularly if it was from a group, and if it's extended into passing a piece of work round or publishing it – may last, but it may not, and the student may see only another scrap of paper full of errors. The very fact that there is so much more in people's heads makes the early, struggling writing deeply disappointing to the writer. Our written record should try to weigh against this.

And lastly, we should not underestimate the effect of re-presenting writing, in typed fair copy form and in all the forms from there on to printed and published work, as a form of marking. To treat work in this way is to mark it out as serious, worth attention, available to be read. Everyone appreciates clean typed copies, and can learn from the silent correcting that is done by normalizing spelling and punctuation. And many are keen to discuss the form of presentation: large or small print, line-broken or not, illustrated, titled? These aren't just activities for the occasional writing day, they have a place in the routine attention to writing.

So my provisional balance is: marking for correctness should be as light as possible, and supplemented by typed fair copies for reference back. If a student demands heavy marking, I'd negotiate, and explain my reasons. Marking for communication, meaning and shape should be as full as possible. I haven't always worked this way, but that's what I've reasoned my way through to.

I've concentrated on the tutor's responsibility: but why shouldn't students write comments on each other's work?

Let's try one example to apply these arguments to. It's artificial to respond to one piece of work from an unknown writer: but recognizing that, how would you 'mark' this?

I have habits I would like to chinge
but how to chinge them I do not-
know. som habits is good and —
some is bad. I do not fine it
Easy to sorted out my bed habits.
When someone at home tell me about
my dad habite. I tell them about
their. so how I am going to get -
over my. bad. habits

3 CELEBRATING AND EXTENDING

If we accept the theory that students' writing will extend by means of response to it as communication, then we have to organize for writing to be read and responded to. We have to organize audiences.

The first readership is likely to be other students. This is harder for one-to-one students, who have no face-to-face group to share with. But in most situations, some of the following are possible:
- circulating copies of writing
- pen friends (do these schemes work?)
- a writing notice board or occasional exhibitions
- centre or area magazines
- events: reading evenings, writing days.

Some of them need resources, and some need co-operation with other bodies, especially for the majority of us who share our teaching space with other users. But this can be turned to advantage. There would be a lot to say in an exchange between an adult class and a school remedial group using the same room in the day.

A word about reading aloud. Reading your work to a group of your fellows is an ordeal; but it's also a celebration, and a milestone. Listeners respond, laugh, applaud, and never harass slow readers. The reward to communication overcomes the indirectness and the labour of writing. It's a specially good end to a day or weekend spent writing together. Robert Merry's Special Activities Project has produced leaflets on reading evenings and on writing weekends (see 'Further reading').

You can look to wider circulation of work around the basic education readership. Publish and distribute your own booklets. Peckham's *How to make a book* will help a lot with production processes. You do need resources for sales as well as production.

The other area for extension of writing within basic education itself is the running and activity of the centre or scheme. Students have written for purposes of publicity; welcoming new students; training tutors; reviewing books; joining in management and fund-raising; organizing course work, inviting speakers, arranging visits; and making the case for literacy work. There is now a wholly student-run National Students' Association for basic education, whose address is in 'Further reading'. Look again at Graham Langton's and John Glynn's statements, in sections A11 and A12, and see how far your organization carries out the notion of an apprenticeship in writing for students.

We can also, as tutors, look for situations which will take student work to a readership which doesn't share our concerns, and where the writing will have to take its chances. Any support we can give here will depend on what we've been allowed to know of students' lives and associations outside the class. Many students hold back from formal social groups – unions, tenants' associations, interest clubs, local pressure groups, politics – because of the paperwork, so we may need to organize rehearsals.

Personal and expressive writing is not confined to adult education classes. What should be an obvious link out of the 'basic' sector, though it doesn't happen as often as it should, is with writers' workshops in local communities. We can make sure the link works one way, by buying the books and magazines and inviting in the writers from local groups; it may take longer negotiation before many writers from basic classes take themselves across this divide. Writers from Gatehouse have been well received, though, at the annual gathering of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. Perhaps joint local events can keep the door open for anyone who wants to go through it. For local groups, contact the Federation, or indeed your local adult centre or Workers' Educational Assocition.

Paid work does not loom large here as a context for using writing. Basic education takes in a wide range of students, and some of them will have their sights on office work, or will be grappling already with various forms of reporting and recording, often by means of long hours of unpaid work at home, and supported by spouse, children and dictionary. If we're let in on this, our job is clear. But for many other people, writing is a test for work but not a work skill, and this is sometimes presented as a major block against doing writing work in a class. I hope I've suggested enough ways round this block: there are other forms of real communication in writing even if we leave work out of the account.

What people may need to do, as Cloeta's account in section A6 suggests, is to write for work training or other forms of study. Advice on these forms of writing is easier to come by, though often pitched at a high level of demand for reading skill. This pack touches lightly on some appropriate forms: enquiry, interviewing, argument and so on. The work that still needs to be done is on how these special uses of writing are best integrated with a whole course of writing development.

It's clear that we need a range, wider than we have at present, of reading for students, looked at from the point of view of the models it offers for writing. We have in ten years published enough of some of the forms of writing by inexperienced writers to offer plenty of examples and encouragement. But this published material needs to get around more and to be used more actively: it needs to be thought about and applied in terms of the kind of composition problems it solves; and it needs to be added to, and set in its place among a wider range of writing from many sources.

Before this can be done, and before we can draw up a well informed curriculum for adults learning to write, we will have to investigate and think about learning processes that have not had high priority within British education yet: where is our National Writing Project? One form of enquiry, which I have tried to start and which tutors and students could carry out together, is to look to students whose writing has developed, and to record with them how this development has come about.

4 TRAINING OURSELVES

There is no-one out there to train us; and in any case, some of the best preparations for work on developing writing are sessions where tutors share their experience, including their experience as writers, and explore their own attitudes and ideas. Here are some suggestions for sessions that you can run yourselves.

1. Give yourselves time to write together. Pick one of the classic subjects – my childhood, my education, my work; or start as a 'warming-up group', with a clean slate. Everyone writes something, and reads it back to the group. Give yourselves time to discuss how it felt and how it applies to your teaching groups.

2. Practise listening and scribing. In pairs, turn and turn about, one talks and the other writes down an agreed text of what she says. Again, what did it feel like? What was the balance between letting the conversation run and getting things down? Was the scribing accurate? How do you like not being in control?

3. Talk about your own development as users of spoken English. Are you standard English speakers? All the time? Have you always been what you are now? If you have changed, when and why? Was 'proper English' emphasized at school? What do you feel now about dialect forms, in speech or writing?

4. Exchange 'marking', or borrow written work from students you don't know and discuss your responses to it. How much can you do without knowing the student and her history?

5. Brainstorm on 'the writing curriculum'. What uses of writing have a place in your lives? What do you think are the specialized uses of writing in this society? Are there any reasons for excluding any of them from a curriculum for adult students?

6. Monitor, as a group, the time you spend on writing as against reading, and on composition as against transcription. Visiting each other's classes could help.

7. Tape record some sessions – with students' agreement, of course – and listen to them with others to work out what's going on, and how it could be different.

8. Get support – from a nearby group that has published; or a Federation of Worker Writers group; from community media groups – for a workshop on display, presentation and publication.

Enjoy yourselves. And do some further reading.

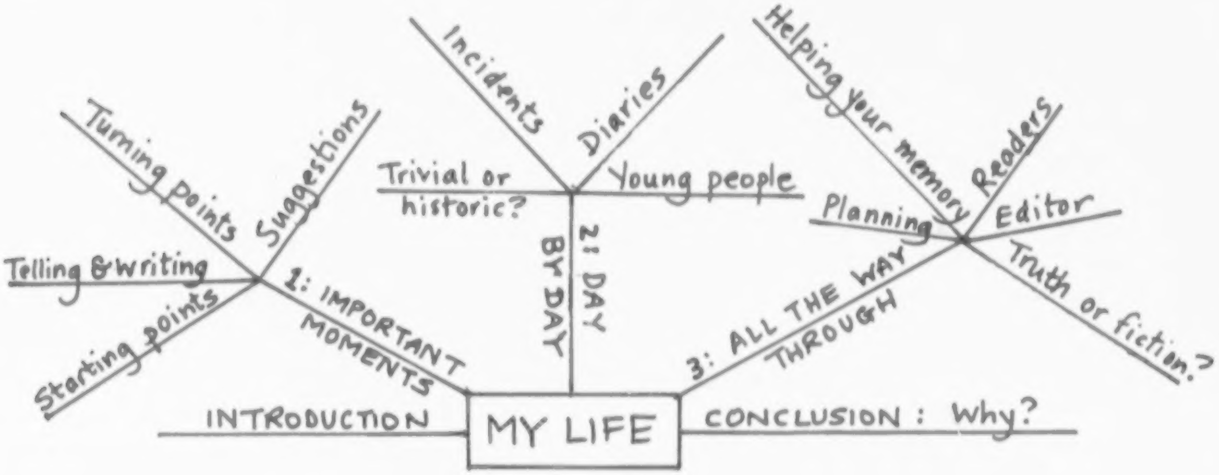
SOMETHING ABOUT MY LIFE

'. . . Because there's so much I really want to write down, I mean all the nice things that's happened to me since I joined this class, and lots of things that's happened in my life, you know. . . . Why do I want to write it down? To me I think it's a wonderful thing, not only for myself but I think it's nice for my friends or my relatives or my children, to look back on my life, what's happened to me. And I think it's important to me because I love to know about other people's life. I'd love to sit down and talk to somebody about their lives and write it down, because now that I can read and I found a lot of things about people's lives, I'd love to write a book . . . .

I think it makes you more stronger in lots of ways too. I mean, we often think our life's very bad, but when you listen to someone else's life, it's a lot harder and I think it gives you more strength to carry on.

Whatever I write down, I want to share it with the world.
Ellen Knada, Halifax.

When you come to a class and start writing, often what you write is 'something about my life'. This section offers you some suggestions for how to work on it. It also takes you through from short incidents to longer and fuller writing, if that's how you want to develop. Here is a map of the contents.


Turning points
Suggestions
Telling & writing
Starting points
1: IMPORTANT MOMENTS
Incidents
Diaries
Trivial or historic?
Young people
2: DAY BY DAY
Helping your memory
Readers
Planning
Editor
Truth or fiction?
3: ALL THE WAY THROUGH
INTRODUCTION
MY LIFE
CONCLUSION : Why?

You may want to read through before you pick what to do. You won't want to work through from beginning to end and act on everything you see.

Your life story is the story you know best, which makes it a good starting point for writing. Your experience has made you what you are and taught you what you know, and whatever you write, you will draw on your experience.

There is no reason why writing about what you know should come out as sentences about *me*. It might come out as 'Killing the pig', or 'How to harvest coffee', or 'Children's games', or 'What unemployment does to people'. Some people don't like to write about themselves. Some people think that what happens to one person is less important than what she learns from it, or how it fits into a wider pattern of life. It may be that people who grow up in the Western industrial countries, with a Christian tradition, have a different idea of the value of 'me', the individual, whereas other traditions work out in different ways what is worth saying about life.

All the same, 'something about my life' is a necessary piece of work for many people. This isn't only true for those of us who are learning and practising writing. When ordinary people write for quite different reasons, life stories are still important. If you look at books from community publishing groups, or at a magazine from a Writers' Workshop in your area (if there is one), you will see that a lot of the writing is life stories, all through or in parts. The 'Further reading' section makes some suggestions about where to start finding these.

It's useful to read work that is like what you are thinking of writing. In all these long sections, I've offered you things to read as one way of making suggestions. You need to work out your own way of using them. For me, when I'm planning writing, I like to read: it gives me ideas about what I don't want to do as well as what I do. When I'm doing the writing, I don't want to read: other people's words get in the way of my own. But if I hadn't read around, I might not have been able to see what sort of thing I could write.

You'll have to work by yourself and together about how to move to and fro between reading and writing.

1 IMPORTANT MOMENTS

STARTING POINTS

Often when people start writing about themselves, they try to do the whole lot. This isn't a mistake; it may be a first draft that lets you see what you really want to follow up. Your life has more in it than you can get down in one go. You may need to choose just one stage of your life, or one event, or one aspect, and focus on that. This is one woman's first draft:

My name is Brenda A. I was born in Oakland, Calif. Highland Hospital, April 3, 1956. I was raised in Oakland. I went to Clawson Elemenry School from there I went to Stonehurst school I granated from Durant Elemenary School. I went to Hoover junior high School for the three years I was in Junior High school. I played ball for all the schools I went to. I played volly ball basketball and I also played Baseball. In the summer of 1973 I got pregnant that when I had my first child. I was going to the tent grade. I went to Oakland Tech I was sixteen years old when I got pregnant but I had my son when I was Seventeen years old, but I steel went to school but I went to Grant High But after I had my first child I moved out. Then Seven months later I got prenant with my second child. But I steel didn't stop going to school. But it was very hard for me. But I done it. In June 14, 1975 I graguarted out over Grant High school with my two sons. Now I'm in fouth year over college and I'm ready to have my three child.

(This is the only piece that I have put in print without sorting out the spelling. I've done so because the teacher in California who asked Brenda's permission to use her work printed it like this – see 'Further reading'. So I didn't think it was up to me to change it. You could use it to test the point that the meaning comes through, even when there are errors of spelling and punctuation.)

What Brenda decided to work on this time was a piece about her volleyball team in college.

These are some starting points that people have found useful:
The birth of my child
Starting work, first job
Moving: a new house, a new country
Outside events: wars, strikes, drought, flood . . . .
A death in the family
Childhood or school

Norma, from Norfolk, chose a particular time and remembered a lot of details:

I used to go to Sunday School with a boy who lived a couple of doors away, he was nice and became my next boyfriend. My room looked out onto his garden, so at night I would stand at my window and wave to him. My friends Rosie, Caggy and I went to the pictures on a Saturday night. We all fell in love with David and we all fought over him. We were all in the same class at Secondary School and we all tried to sit near him in class. I remember at Christmas time, he bought me a box of paints and a book and I bought him a belt. We all went to church together. This particular Christmas we saw the nativity play. He walked me home because there were no street lights and it was raining. We stopped by the telephone box and he took off his leather jacket and put it over my head and gave me a kiss. (Funny how the first kiss is always remembered.)

This was done on tape first, and Norma decided later which bits to keep in and re-write.

TELLING AND WRITING

Isaac has written about his life more than once. The first time he wrote about his school days, it was like this:

I left the infants school
and went to the ordinary big school.
I just feel I didn't learn anything.
when the teacher ask a question
the others put their hand up,
and I couldn't put mine up.
I wouldn't go to school any more.
I started to cry and hide from school.
I leave the home
like I go to school
and then stop on the way
and just play around on the common.
When my mother give my money
in the morning, for lunch,
I throw it away.
One of my friends told her
I wasn't going to school.
The evening I came home, she beat me.
She still send me back to the school.
I still wouldn't go.

He dictated that to a tutor, and she wrote it down. Some years later, he wrote about it again. This is what it came out like:

'When I was a young man grow up, I suffer a lot because my father did not married to my mother. The lady my father married to treat me like I did not belong to the world. She treat me like a tree stump in the open field. She did not treat me like a lovely mother-in-law. She beat me. Also bad when it come on to the food, I got the worst. She used to send me to school but I would not go. I did not have the sense to know what education could do for me. Sometimes, a morning time, when she send me to school I cry and threw away my lunch money and also hide from school. Is after a while I really was on the wrong side of the road when I see the other children them going and coming from school a daytime, I really should be with them playing and laughing and jump, but I know I make a big mistake. Sometime when I see the other children them playing and I cannot, I feel I could kick myself. The worst part of it is on holiday time, when I see the truck loaded with young and old people going on outing, especially going to fair and I cannot go. Sometimes I feel like I don't belong to the world.

I asked him why it was so different. This is what he said:

Isaac: Yes, it's differently. You see, at the time when I did the first book, I didn't wrote it myself. So I say it to you, I say it differently, but me now wrote it myself, I able to say it different and put it the way I say it.
Sue: Right, yes. You're more in control.
Isaac: Correct . . . . For you see, now me have a scaredness there, to say it to you that way, but do it myself now, I have account for myself.
Sue: Yes, right because – you didn't know us so well; and perhaps if there's always someone asking questions, that doesn't always leave room for the things you want to say.
Isaac: Not at all, and at the same moment too, you know, somebody ask the question, you don't really remember what to say. You just cut it off short, just carry on –
Sue: But then the more you think –
Isaac: The more you think the more you remember, you know. For some time you might ask me question and I don't remember what it was, but after a little while I remember it, I can go back again and wrote it down.
Sue: But do you think you would have even tried if we hadn't done the first book?
Isaac: No, no, no.

TURNING POINTS

The next piece is an unusual one, because it had a definite shape the first time Pauline wrote it:

There was an air of expectancy about the place as the people filed in and sat down. Their conversation went in peaks and troughs, and there were smiles and laughter sprinkled around the crowd.

I sat at the front, I was bubbling over with happiness and joy, a huge smile spread across my face.

People came to give me their good wishes, smiling as they spoke to me.

I was nervous, through my happiness. This was the most important day of my life apart from the day I was born.

I was about to die, and I looked forward to it with joy, happiness and eagerness.

The music struck up and the people rose singing their hearts out, raising the rafters.

There were two others came to join me. We wore white garments and we smiled and greeted each other, they too had committed themselves to die.

I was the first to go, I timidly stepped forward. I wasn't afraid, only nervous, but my heart was over flowing with joy. As I stepped down into the water, I clasped my hands in front of me and said a little prayer. Then woosh I was down in the water, fully immersed, water covering every part of me. I died, and was re-born. As I came up out of the water, my whole being was filled with love and peace, my joy shining in my face, as I gave my life to the Lord, and was baptized. Born again as a Christian, a new person in Christ.

When she read this back to her group, she talked about the experience as well. It came out very differently:

Pauline: It's marvellous how your life changes as well, you know, when you become a Christian, because before I were a Christian, I had been married before, you know, to my second husband, and we've got a mixed family, there's seven children, you know, and we've had so much problems, in the past; and last year one of my children went into care because he didn't get on with my husband, you know, and they were always fighting, and I were frightened of what were going to happen and me and my husband were on the verge of splitting up before I came to know the Lord. And the difference since, it's tremendous because it's altered –I mean when my husband saw the change in me, when I started going to church, he got interested, and he started going and it sort of tempered him down and he's got more patience now and he doesn't scream and bawl and go for them, you know, it's marvellous what's happened, yes, it is really.

Again, I asked Pauline if she could say why she did it like this:

Pauline: When I'm writing the thoughts that are in my head, I just put them down as I'm thinking them. I knew what I was going to write about, I didn't know how it would come out: well, that's how it came out, and I didn't make any alterations. Mostly things I write about are more emotion, really, because I have such an emotional upheaval going on all the time, more or less, in my life. I think it's a way of releasing the tension.
Sue: And once you've written it, it seems as if it's easier to show it to someone else and talk to someone else – is that true?
Pauline: Yes; even to a total stranger like you, yes.
Sue: It's as if it has become more – manageable? Impersonal?
Pauline: Probably that – impersonal.

Pauline's writing is also a link with the past, and with the beginnings of writing life stories in our culture. Until about the time of Queen Elizabeth I, nobody wrote much about the daily lives of ordinary people; or if they did, they wrote about them as types more than individuals. And, of course, most ordinary people could not write enough to write about themselves. There was a change with the change in religion – the start of what we now call Protestant Christianity. This put the emphasis on the idea that each person could have a direct relationship with God; and they also thought it was important that people could change their ways, or become converted. So the history of each individual soul, rich or poor, became significant.

Some people wrote their life stories when they got converted. They often dressed up how bad they had been before and how good they were after conversion! But in the best of them, you are taken inside the struggles in one person's life.

John Bunyan, who is famous for writing *A Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote his life story as well, published in 1666.

If you get interested in old autobiographies, you will find that most of them are by men.

SUGGESTIONS

CHOOSING WHERE TO START

* Remember you don't have to write it yourself.
* Remember what Ellen said: what would your children and grandchildren be interested in?
* Try drawing a map of your life as a road, with hills, bends, crossroads, bumpy bits; you can draw things by the side of the road to suggest the main events. This may help you find a start. (This idea is described more fully in *Getting started*: see 'Further reading'.)
* Try slices of your life at ten-year intervals: When I was six, when I was sixteen, when I was twenty-six . . . .
(See Dot Johnson's piece, 'Life began at forty', in *WFT* year 8 no. 3.)

FOCUSING

* There is a whole section later on with ideas on how to focus your writing – how to go for a few definite things in a big subject. But for your life story: you can try
– the family photographs
– photographs of just you at different stages in your life – a 'Life Line'
– furniture, keepsakes, household things
– things people used to say
– 'That was the day when . . .'

OTHER PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE

* This can be hard. Do you have the right to say what you think about them? How do you show what another person is like? Try going for detail again: 'My sister's hats'.

* If you don't feel you can get your impressions of a person into balance, try making a list. Put down all the separate points you think are important about them. You can arrange it afterwards.

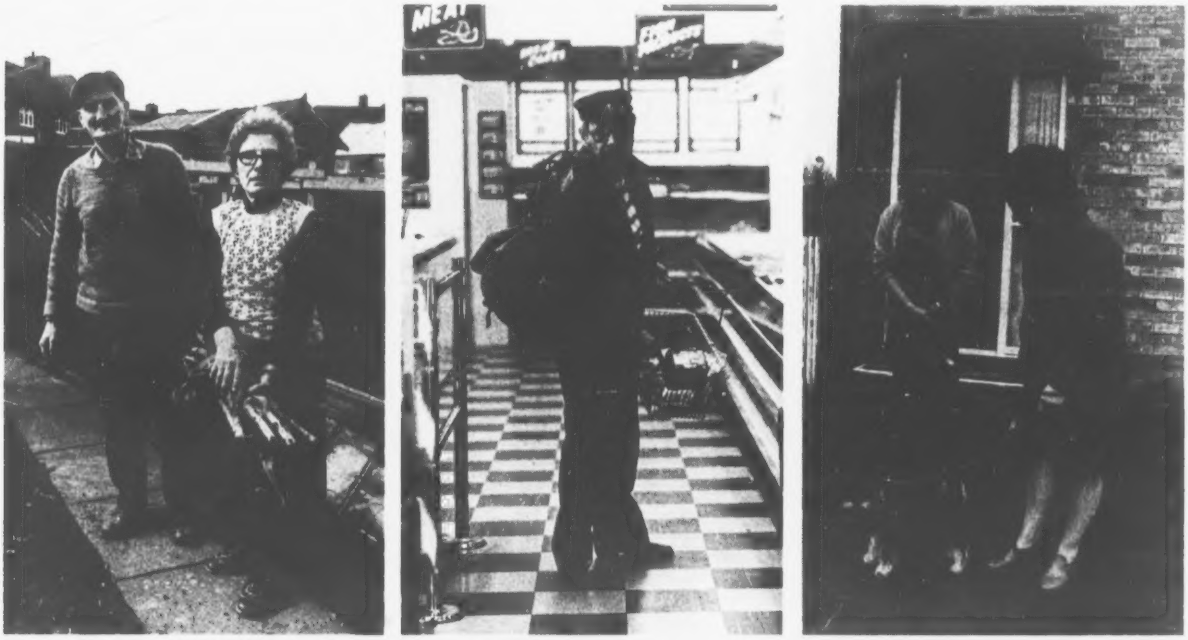
HARD TIMES, GOOD TIMES

* People do write about bad times in their lives: you've read an example in this section. Why? Can you only write about it when you feel it's behind you? Does writing help you put it behind you?

* Why is it so hard to write about good times in a way that makes other people enjoy reading about them? Prove me wrong! Find some examples, or write some yourself

2 DAY BY DAY

TRIVIAL OR HISTORIC?



You don't have to look back on your life; you can write about how you live now. That can be hard, for all sorts of reasons. I've heard comments like these so often:
'Who would be interested in what I do?'
'I don't do anything, there would be nothing to say.'
'It's too depressing, I don't want to think about it.'

Everyone's life has things that are interesting; they may be interesting just because they are like other people's lives. Write First Time has printed pieces about: why I didn't come to my class last week; leaving a note for the milkman; the baby putting his shoes in a vase of water; going downstairs in the morning and meeting my brother coming upstairs from night shift. They have all been read with pleasure by other people. None of them was more than 20 short lines long.

We need ordinary things written down, so we can recognize our own lives in what other people do.

We need to write ordinary things down, so that we and other people can pay attention to them.

Some things you may not want to write about for other people. I'll say something in a moment about private writing.

First I want to convince you about the value of setting down the ordinary details of your life.

In Sweden, there is something called the Household Budget Investigation which has been going on since 1912. This is what a historian called Sven Lindqvist said about it:

'Thousands of working class and lower middle class families were asked to keep detailed accounts of their earnings and expenditure over several months. These accounts still exist and tell us precisely how much coffee labourer Karl Malmkvist and his family at the Degerhamm Cement Works could afford to buy in 1933, how much milk, how much kerosene, and what presents they gave each other for Christmas.

When young workers in Degerhamm Cement Works today read that Anna Malmkvist bought five pennies' worth of TOOTHWAX or 11 pence worth of CARBIDE they ask themselves: What was toothwax? What was Carbide used for?

The natural thing for them to do is to take the car and visit the old age clinic at the hospital where Anna Malmkvist was staying in 1977. She was then already very old and weak. When I asked to interview her, she sent word that she didn't remember anything and didn't care to talk. But when young people came from the factory that was something different. And when they brought with them a copy of that old household account book from 1933, with all those things she had bought for her husband and children so long ago, all neatly put down in her own familiar handwriting –well, she couldn't help but be interested.

Toothwax?

Well that was a kind of yellow paste for filling the black holes in your teeth to lessen the pain and to make them look nicer while you were waiting for the district physician to come to the factory every six months or so . . . .

Carbide?

Well it looked like white gravel and we used it for fuel in Karl's bicycle lamp . . . .

And out comes the whole story of how Karl had the bicycle to get to work while she had to walk that distance when she went to the factory with his lunch every day.

And then carry on up the hill to the co-operative store to buy all the things which she then had to carry home without a bicycle – and a very long time it took especially through the snow in winter time, till finally she got home, after dark, to the infants she had bound with a piece of rope to the kitchen bench – 'You see, I used to rope them to the bench with one pillow at the front and one pillow at the back so that they wouldn't hurt themselves while I was away'.

Another example of how the knowledge and experience of ordinary people is important is in the book called *Maternity*. Working class women wrote letters about what it was like to have their babies, at a time when ante-natal care, maternity benefits and birth control were nothing like they are now. It was partly because of reading this book that the Hackney Reading Centre decided to work on their book, *Every Birth It Comes Different*.

INCIDENTS

Just think back over yesterday, or over the last week, to find something that has stuck in your mind.

ELENE

Elene lit the oil heater
and she did not tell Karen.
Karen went into the bedroom
and she put her hand on the oil heater.
Elene had the good sense
to take Karen to the cold water tap.
She put Karen's hand under it.
She was screaming.
I went to the phone box to call my husband –
he wasn't there.
I came back
and went to see my next door neighbour.
she said she would take me and Karen
to the hospital in her car.
When we got there,
the doctor said Karen would have to go in
as he did not know how bad they were.
He told her, 'You would have to come in
or your hands will fall off!'
She stayed in there Saturday night
and all day Sunday.
The doctor said
that her hands was not as bad as he thought,
she could come home on Monday.
But I had to take her on Wednesday afternoon.
The burns are better now.
Elene has blamed herself for what happened,
she is so careful now.
Rene.

THE BOSS

I've been all over the West End today,
Oxford Street, all round there.
Never got home till 6 or 7.
I went out in my boss's car today –
first time in two years
that we ever said more than two words –
I can't talk to him like, you know,
but in the car
we said more than two words – three.
He said, 'Hello, forget it'.

Michael.

Both of these work as stories on their own. Or they could be the start of something longer. What questions would you ask Michael and Rene to encourage them to say more?

Incidents like this have been made into books on their own. Look at Frances Holden's books from Gatehouse, and at *I got it right* and *Doing my flat up* from Hackney Reading Centre. Do the pictures help? Would pictures help your story?

DIARIES

Diaries can take many shapes, and can be used for different things.
- To make you practise writing every day
- To set up a job that tutors can share in too
- To keep track of what you are learning
- to record things for people who aren't here (or who aren't born yet)
- To help a group share each other's experiences outside the class.

Jane Mace sets this out in more detail in *Learning from experience* (pp. 23-24 and 33-36), and gives you some good stuff to read.

You can decide to keep a diary when something important is happening. It might be a big event that makes the headlines. (Think about why people kept diaries during the war.)

But it might also be something that is just important to you. Here are some examples:
- Your first child going to school
- Being made redundant
- Being ill, or in hospital
- Making a garden from scratch (photos!)
- Learning to read and write
- Going back to work when your children are grown up.

Writing it down will help you remember later. In ten years' time you'll be amazed at what you did and thought and felt.

DETAILS

* It's easy to take for granted that people know the detail of our daily lives. 'Went to the shops' – boring! But for different people, it might mean a bike ride to a small general shop and post office, or a walk through dirty streets to a supermarket with wire mesh on the windows, or getting the freezer load in once a month in the car, or pushing the pram round a vegetable market with produce from all over the world.

* Even if the scenes around you are the same, you don't notice the same things as other people. Say what you see and hear and smell. Look at the later section called 'Focus'.

TAPING

* You could tape a little day by day. You'll need to find out if you can just talk to the machine, or if you need to talk to someone else with the machine running. Then you can write down as much of it as you want later, or get someone else to.

PRIVATE WRITING

* Some things you write, you won't want to share with your group. Maybe you will just want one or two people to read them. Maybe you won't want your writing marked for correctness.

Some things you write, you may not want anyone to see at all. There's nothing wrong with that. Writing can still help you to find out, and sort out, what you think or feel. It can be a good move, when you write for your own understanding more than to make an impression.
Keep it, whatever it's like. You can always learn something from your own work.

NOT FORGETTING THE YOUNG PEOPLE

If we aren't careful, it can sound as if only older people have interesting experiences to record.

But if I want to find something to read about these things:
- first dates
- village life in India
- living in Uganda when Amin was the ruler
- starting work
- and, of course, just being young!
- I know some good writing by young people that will tell me about it. I've listed it in 'Further reading'.

As Bonnie says in *Bonnie, Freda and Ann*:

> . . .But it does still make me wonder when people say to me that at 17 life's just beginning. I shudder at the thought. I suppose what people mean by living is having a career and a family. Well if that's the case what on earth have I been doing for 17 long, hard years? Surely I haven't been dead all that time?

3 ALL THE WAY THROUGH

'This is work we do over one year and 6 months.
We start off
and it growing more and more.
Then it getting interesting.
So we decide to put it together.
I am telling Jud about my life
and she just write it down.
I like to do it
and I hope other people like to read it.
– *Going where the work is*: Afterword

PLANNING

Most people don't start off by saying they want to write their whole life story. They start with bits, and then it gets interesting – it starts to add up.

But even if you do decide before you start to write your whole life, you don't have to start at the beginning. You don't have to make a plan of the whole thing before you start, either.

You could think of main changes in your life. One student said to me,

'Before 1978 I never did anything for myself, I just did things for other people.'

What happened in 1978? I never got round to asking.

Be imaginative about it. I could split my life into different kinds of clothes. Hand-me-down years; school uniform years; baggy sweater years; mini-skirt years; nothing definite years; respectable years (more or less). Maybe you could do it by music, or where you lived.

You can think of surprises: When I was 16 I never imagined that I would . . .

You can compare your life with your mother's or father's, or your grandparents'.

You can make the big statements and then go back and fill in the detail later: The most important influences in my life have been . . . . (If you do this, be prepared for some surprises. It may not look the same when you've written it all down!)

HELPING YOUR MEMORY

You probably remember more about your life than you think you do. But your memory may need some help.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Go through the family photographs, if you have some. Do it when other family members are around: you'll jog each other's memories. You may move from memory into research:

PICTURES OF LIFE

My grandmother will be 96 tomorrow (14.6.84) so I thought it would be nice to put together some old photographs and to tell the stories behind them . . . .

The wedding of Emily and Jesse, pictured front row second and third from the right.

One week after the wedding Emily and Jesse Masters boarded an old cattle boat and set sail for Canada, where they were to spend three years working on a huge farm on the prairie land of a place called Saskatchewan. Emily worked as a cook for the farm labourers, whilst Jesse worked on the land.

The farm in Saskachewan, Canada. Emily pictured with the son of one of the farm labourers and his dog.

Jesse, pictured underneath the hay wagon (the one without the hat on). Work was long and hard and moments like these must have been cherished.
Mark

See if your local library has a picture library. Or else your local newspaper. You'll find pictures like:
The worst bombing raid of the war
The big flood
The high street shops as they used to be
Buses and cars
Coronation street parties
Whitsun parades or annual outings.

Your old school, or your education office, may have pictures of your class. (They may also have registers to help you remember names; log books that will tell you about important events; punishment books – what did children get beaten for?).

We've moved over into

RECORDS

You may not think much of your life is on record, but a lot of things that happened in it are maybe down on paper:
Family letters
Birth, death and marriage certificates
Ration books
Seamen's pass books, trade union cards
Old school exercise books

And in libraries: Street directories – who *did* own the corner shop? Local newspapers.

TIME CHART

How does your life fit in with big public events?
Can you remember the drought year, 1976?
Or the last miners' strike, 1974?

It can be useful to do a time chart to match up the big events in your life with things that were happening outside – and maybe not just outside; they have affected you. The Falklands war will be family history as well as book history for a lot of people

Again, library books can help. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* lists all sorts of events year by year, in different countries too. So you can check Jamaica's independence as well as the end of National Service in Britain.

OTHER PEOPLE

One of the best memory aids is to talk to other people you have known for a long time. It may also help you see what is special about *your* point of view. Have a tape recorder running while you talk.

But you can also use people you don't know so well – like your reading class. This has two uses:
– If other people's lives are very different, it may help you to be exact about yours.
– You will find out what they don't know, how much you have to explain to get things clear to them.

READERS

If you're going to all the trouble of writing about your whole life, do you want other people to read it? Or is it just for you, to get things clear?

If you do want other people to read it, you need to think what will keep them interested.

Here are some extracts from other life stories that I find interesting. Do you? If so, what is it that keeps it alive?

ON EARTH TO MAKE THE NUMBERS UP

"What did Mrs Jones want you for last night?" I asked.

"Oh she wasn't very well. She's got a new baby girl and they are going to call it Rebecca."

"When did she get that?"

"Last night when I was round there."

"Did the nurse bring it?"

"Yes."

"Did you see it in the black bag?"

"Why are women always poorly when the nurse brings them a baby?"

"Well they are not really poorly but they have to stay in bed to keep the baby warm."

"Can I see the baby?"

"Yes if you stop asking questions and eat your breakfast I'll take you round before you go to school. I've promised I'll tidy up for her."

We went round to the Jones' and I was greatly surprised to find the baby not in bed with its mother, as I'd expected, but in a washing basket on a chair; it looked comfortable enough. I was disgusted, what a place to put it! I put my hand out to touch.

"Don't!" mam warned.

I looked at the baby's screwed up face, "Hasn't it got a lot of hair?"

"Don't touch its head, it's got a soft spot and you might hurt it and don't lean over it like that, you're breathing in its face. Steady now or you'll have the basket over." All of a sudden Mrs Jones had become very bossy.

"You are a very cruel mother!" I was so angry.

"Evelyn!"

"Well, she is. She's supposed to be in bed keeping the baby warm and she's shoved it in a clothes basket."

I decided I wasn't talking to my mam when I came home at dinner time but I need not have bothered because she had no time for me, she was too busy talking to my Aunty in the living room. I sat having my dinner and I could overhear them quite plainly.

"Yes lass, it's funny now but last night was a nightmare. He was sat in the chair crying and her upstairs screaming her bloody head off and every time she had a pain she flew under the bed."

"Under the bed?"

"Yes. I'm telling you lass, every time she had a pain, there she was under the bed and me and the midwife on our hands and knees trying to get her out. In the end I tied some rope round the door handle and said, 'Here lass, swing onto this'."

"Did she have a bad time then?"

"No lass, I've seen worse but the amount of palaver she was kicking up you'd have swore we were killing her. In the end the midwife smacked her face. Well I didn't like to see that so I came down and do you know what he was doing?"

"No, what?"

"He was on his knees praying."

"Praying?"

"Aye. Praying like mad!"

"And what did you do?"

"I told him straight. He would have been better off praying a few months ago instead of doing that what got the babby. Ooh Bloody Hell, I hope our Evelyn's not listening."

But I had been listening and although this may sound sneaky, I had to be sneaky to learn anything. I lived in a world of whispering and of superstition and fear; I was never allowed access to a newspaper and if I gave a second glance at my mother's weekly book, the Red Letter, I was given a back hander and the book put out of reach. Everyone around me seemed to have something to say that I was not to hear. Mam would whisper with my Aunties and if she met anyone down the shops and wanted to speak with them I was sent a couple of yards down the street out of earshot. She whispered with Mrs Jessop over the railings; the teachers whispered in the corridors and in the playground; patients whispered in the Surgery and even the people behind the shop counters would lean right over and whisper to their customers. The girls in the top class would stand giggling and whispering in groups. All this caused me much annoyance and left me in a narrow, small world.

Evelyn Haythorne

PURE RUNNING

Most of the time the weather is hot.
If you are indoors, you feel so hot.
The only thing is to go underneath the trees
and they shade you.

But sometimes the wind blow very hard
and sometimes the river come down.
The minute water fall overhead,
the river come down.

The animals wash away.
Even if you tie them to a tree,
the tree break
and they wash into the river.
So then you have to go to swim
and go to the deep water.
Cows, pigs, goats, chickens,

everything wash away.
If you're lucky,
they might catch in the branches
and you find them.

I remember a man who had many cows.
He had one cow, a lovely milking cow,
it was wash away.
And he asked my brother and me to look for it.
My brother went into a deep hole in the river
and he found it.
It caught on a branch.
He tried to bring it out
but it was so heavy with the milk,
he had to milk it first
and throw the milk away.

All the fruit blow down –
mangoes, pears, everything;
green and ripe, they all come down.
And if you got to cross the river
to go to the shop,
you can't cross it.
Sometimes my brother ride on a tree trunk
across the river,
and go across the corn field
a nd that way to the shop,
because he's not afraid of the muddy water.
But when the river really come down,
You got to go elsewhere to shop.

Louise Shore

HARD TIMES AND EASY TERMS

I was on the bottom of Lansdowne Place again. There was only me and other taxi driver called Titch, with an old Limousine Rolls Royce, who worked the rank. One day on the rank, I got talking to a slim sharp-featured, quick talking Cockney fellow whose name was Albert. He was a great conversationalist, and very amusing. I had to go for a fare, and said I would see him again. I forgot about him, until one night I finished early, and on the way home to Borough Street, I went into the 'City of York' for a pint. And there was Albert.

We got a bit tiddly and Albert burst forth into song. Poor Albert had been gassed in the First World War, and his voice was a kind of mixture between a honking old Gander and the fog horn of the Queen Mary. He started off with 'Nellie Dean' and went right through the card up to 'Any Old Iron' – you could hear him three streets away. Whilst singing he made such gestures as putting his hat over his eye like Maurice Chevalier, and the same kind of facial grimaces to go with it.

Albert had a family of about four young children. He was always on the dole, fiddlin' here, fiddlin' there, getting cast-off clothes, shoes, boots, for nothing. Down to the butchers who knew him, buying stewing pieces, scrag ends, pigs' trotters, sheeps' heads, hearts, liver, kidneys,a brains – and then to the grocers, getting bacon knuckles, bacon rinds, cracked eggs, yesterday's bread and cakes, specked fruit, old spuds, limp cabbage, bruised celery, loose tea, skimmed milk, broken biscuits – the Lot, and a lot more besides. Yes, that's how Albert lived, if you could call it living, as most of our class lived in those days. Yet they were happy. Look at Albert! If he got one extra shilling or two, he's have a pint or two and be singing all night. We lived for today. Who cares about tomorrow? Skint again next day, more scrounging and fiddling, and so life went on. But what a life, what a variety. The films and plays had nothing on our lives, mine, Albert's and my mates' lives. Ours was true, not make believe.

Bert Healy.

You will have your own ideas, but these are some of the things that strike me:

EVELYN
uses conversations to bring it to life. She must have made them up, but they sound right.

She also has an idea about herself that she wants you to see: so the conversations lead up to the serious bit in the last paragraph.

LOUISE
makes you see some of the life around her when she was a child. She doesn't set out to do a description, it comes out from what she says about an important event (a flood). She lets you see that her life went on in the middle of a whole way of life.

BERT
has a lot of liveliness and humour. He takes himself out of the middle of the picture and puts someone else there. But the details still tell you about life in general at the time.

If you're getting tired of the sentences that start 'Then I . . .', you could stop and try one of these ideas.

What all three of these writers have is a way of making you hear their voice behind what you read. I'm not sure that there are any techniques for this. Just trust yourself and how you say things. This *voice* is something you can look out for in what you read. Once you find it, it should make reading easier! You know what kind of person you are listening to, so you have a feeling for what she or he might say.

Making this kind of deliberate change of tack isn't always something you can do on a first draft. It may be something to do as you read over what you have done.

To do this on your own is really hard. You may feel, 'I've said it, that's it – what else can I say? That's true, how can I change it?'. You may need the help of a close and friendly reader. People who write for a living have one of those. She or he is an *editor*.

WORKING WITH AN EDITOR

An editor can do several things for you. She can draw you out. This is how one student described it to me:

Brian: I can't remember how far I wrote into my life but in those three pages I got the lot in, know what I mean, I tried to put thirty-odd years into sort of three pages you know.
Sue: So what's gone on since has been a sort of slowing it down and pinning it down.
Brian: Emphasizing them like, what actually happened and places and times and what was said.
Sue: Yes, giving it more detail, yes. So you had sort of short outlines really to start with and – How does that happen, how do you choose which bits to work on?
Brian: When I wrote the bit you saw – John come over and read it, read it through with me like, checked the spellings, then he started what he calls editing. He might say like 'mother and father', write – 'mum in hospital', 'relations between brother and sister'. I stated in there my elder brother and sister – explain why. Even now I've got to emphasize on something in here, you know, like.
Sue: Do you always see the point when he says things like that or do you sometimes think, 'well, I don't want to do that'.
Brian: No – always – when I'm writing it down, I still sometimes don't want to emphasize on something and I cut it short, know what I mean, which I shouldn't. And when we read it over, he says well like, make more sense – explain why – and I do it. If there is something why I don't want to emphasize then, well I say I don't want to on that. 'Fair enough, it still reads all right'.

She can get bits typed for you, so you can see them clearer. She can help you arrange what you write. As Brian said,

'It's moving sentences around and paragraphs around, to fix them in like'.

She can help you see if you have said what you meant to say.

'One of the most common problems inexperienced writers have is that they assume that what is in their minds is also in the reader's mind, so they don't have to put all the thoughts down on the page . . . . The best thing the editor can do is ask questions about the content of the writing.' –J. Herman, *The tutor and the writing student.*

She can show you what other people have done.

She can give you something to disagree with! Sometimes, it's easier to know what you want to do when someone suggests something you don't want to do.

She can tell you what readers may see in your work. You will learn to do this for yourself; but someone else's view is always useful. When you want your writing to be read, it's sometimes hard to know if you have gone from expressing your feelings and thoughts to communicating them. To communicate, you have to be received. Your editor can tell you if she is receiving your message.

Above all, she can encourage you. A life story is a long job. You may lose confidence, get bored, fall ill, need to do other things as well. An editor can help you keep faith that the job is worth finishing, through all the interruptions.

For many of you, the editor will be your tutor. Remember it doesn't have to be . And you don't have to ask for all these kinds of help from the same person. Your family or friends may like to help. Or another student may be a good reader to tell you what she or he gets out of it. Don't be afraid to ask – editors get a lot out of it too! A student will learn a lot from reading and talking about your writing.

And, speaking for myself, editing has been one of the best parts of my job in basic education. It's great to help something grow.

TRUTH AND FICTION

Fiction? But we're talking about life stories, aren't we? Everything in a life story should be true!

Yes, but there's more than one kind of truth. Writing can be indirectly true, even if it isn't true to every last thing that happened and every last word that was said.

Can you use some of the features of fiction to write better about your own life?

Sometimes you simply need to round out memory. We said before that Evelyn Haythorne has probably made up the conversations in her book. This is fair enough, isn't it? They can be true to the sort of thing that was said.

Sometimes it's too close to you. You wouldn't start at all if you had to start with 'I'.

So try saying, 'He got up in the morning and . . .'
'She always wanted to . . .'
'They lived in the sort of street where . . .'
It might give you a bit more freedom.

If you find you've changed things – made them fit together better, finished off things that came to nothing, made the differences between people clearer – you're only making sense out of your life in a different way.

As long as you know what you're doing.

And as long as the reader knows too? Does that matter?

Some people have bad or difficult times in their lives that they don't want to write about directly. Being in prison, having an abortion, a difficult marriage, a time when you did something you feel ashamed of, or even a time when you were badly treated by others (at school?).

You can just leave it alone.

But if the feelings about it put you under pressure and you want to get them out, this may be a good thing to write about indirectly, as fiction.

Sometimes it's good to change the point of view in order to understand. What about writing about your childhood as if you were your mother or father?

Some people simply think it's not fair to the other people in their lives to write about them.

Bessie said,

'Cause if you write about everyday things, you've got to bring somebody else into it. Well, you don't really want that, do you?'

Again, you could get round this by making people up. A lot of people who write for a living say the people in their books are based on real life, but mixed up – no character is all of one real person.

Fiction is also a good way of dealing with what hasn't happened. The 'What if's' and 'If only's' – the fears and the fantasies. We'll be saying more about that in the section called 'Escapes and Changes'. But in one way, everything you write is about you.

CONCLUSION

So why do people write about their lives?

Brian gave one answer:

'It's the only thing we know . . . . It's very hard going, but at the same time it's easy to get it done, because it's the memories, and they're there all the time, know what I mean? You might forget some things, but you know about yourself or what happened in your life, so if you don't do it tonight, next week it's still there.'

Edith found that it got her talking within the family about things that hadn't been shared before:

'My grandson read it . . . and he got chatting to me and he read it through, and he says, "It was never like this," and started asking questions, and as he asked questions I remembered more about it.'

Tina is writing for family too; but because her family is in two countries, it starts her thinking about how people could learn to understand each other:

'In English it's for my children, my grandchildren like. But in Italian, when I retire, more to keep my mind occupied and show my niece and nephew . . . . If I live long enough, I will translate it in Italian . . . . I thought it were important, maybe there's some people, especially men, they'd be in Italy during the war, during the time I wrote about; . . .maybe it could stop the world having another war. I don't know, it's hard, it's very hard to put into everybody's mind, like.'

Louise, who started her book by saying, 'Yes, that was my ambition, to write a book,' found that it took her into some hard memories on the way. But it was worth it:

'Yes, I want to tell it. If a person look at you, they don't know what really happen to you. They see you looking happy and going on sober, but they don't know what really happen.'

And John, who wasn't talking specially about writing life stories but about writing of all kinds, makes the link back for us to why we write about ourselves as part of a study of literacy:

'I think every literacy student should be encouraged to write. It would give them, sort of, one, an exercise – first in writing, gathering information, gathering their thoughts, and putting them down in an organized manner. Also it helps them to give them a sense of themselves. And once a student writes something, and it's published, it gives them a sense of satisfaction, a sense of pride.'

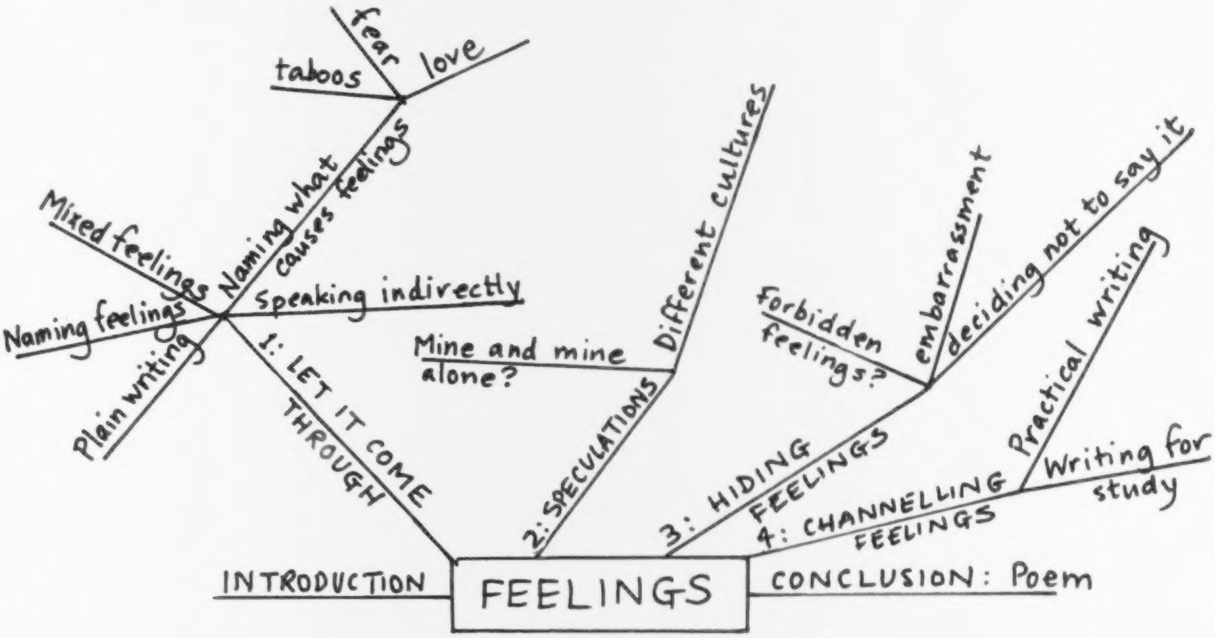
Not every life story will be published – but they can all be read. And can we learn or achieve much without 'a sense of ourselves'?

FEELINGS

This is the hardest section to write. I try and try, and each time I go away into books looking for the writing that will say what I want it to say, and instead I'm overwhelmed with the feelings I'm reading about. It's hard because I don't know who I'm talking to; I lose confidence about pushing something at you that could be explosive without knowing my readers and having some idea what's on their minds. You will have to be the ones to take charge of the timing, and judge when it's a good idea to use this material.

I'll say it again: the section is a resource, for you to pick and refuse. Read it through first, or look at the map to see how the parts fit together; but you won't want to work through from beginning to end and act on everything you read.

This is a map of the contents of this section


fear
taboos
love
Naming what causes feelings
Mixed feelings
Speaking indirectly
Naming feelings
Plain writing
1: LET IT COME THROUGH
Different cultures
Mine and mine alone?
2: SPECULATIONS
Forbidden feelings?
embarrassment
deciding not to say it
3: HIDING FEELINGS
Practical writing
Writing for study
4: CHANNELLING FEELINGS
INTRODUCTION
FEELINGS
CONCLUSION: Poem

Writing about feelings is mysterious. How can the feeling in one person reach another person, through cold print? But it does; and that tells us something about language. We may think we're locked up in our private meanings, but if we put them into language, we put them into a form that other people can get at.

It's only words
And words are all I have
to give to you.
But with these words
my thoughts are deep
deep down inside.
inside of me
inside of me.

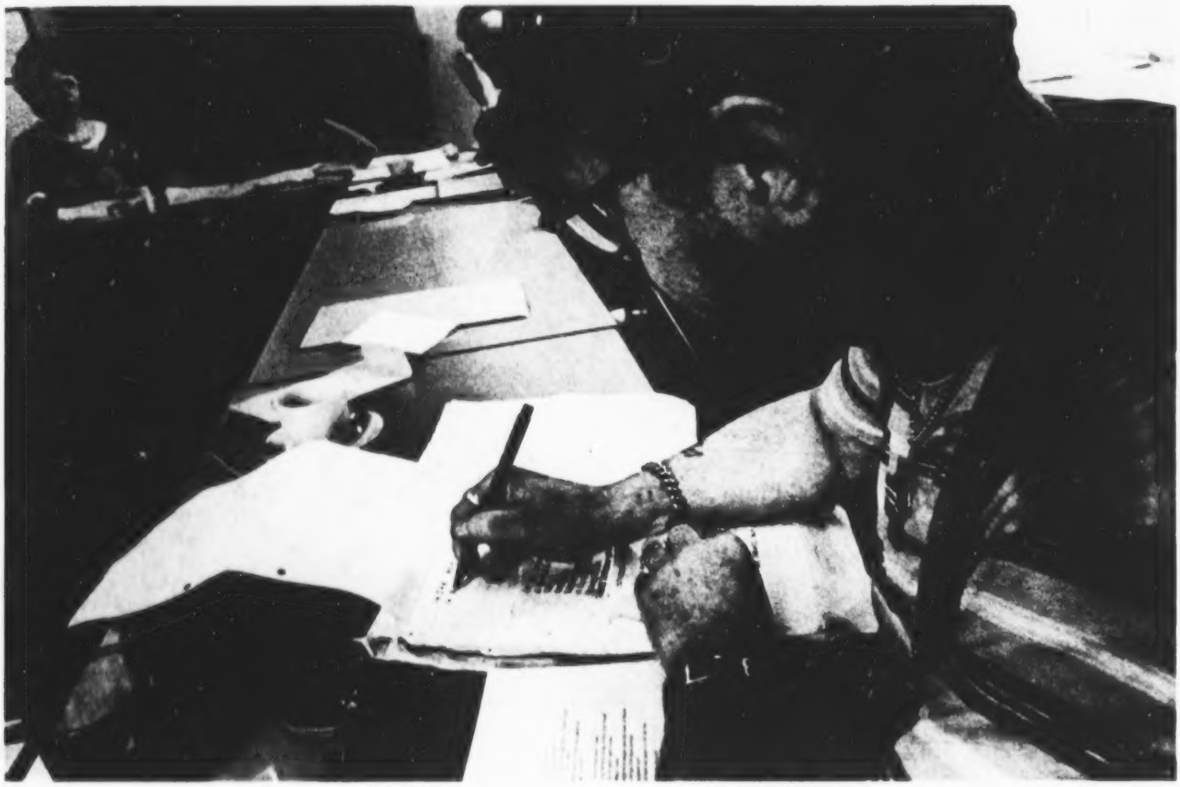
If I could only change,
the thoughts inside of me
would flow from pen to paper,
from breath to sound.
I would be a superman,
a hero, a friend,
inside of me,
inside of me.

I would sing it
I would say it
I would write it first time
My thoughts on paper
P.S. See the new me!

– Tony: *Write First Time* year 3 no. 1.

I suppose many people don't expect feelings to come up in a classroom. But they're always there:

They've locked me in a box
I feel like a prisoner isolated
What do I have to do for my turn
How do I express myself
Just don't know
Anxiety . . .
Try, put some insignificant letters
that means a lot to me
But nobody seems to want to let me free,
Very self-conscious
Very self-centred
It aches like hell
Somehow she comes to approach me
Is there anything else you'd like to do
Yes, is the reply
With a half smile and a great big sigh
Freedom at last, can escape, get away
– Peter: from a diary of the
Summer School, 1984.



And not just feelings about being a student: feelings about each other, about the life we come in from and will go back to. Tutors' feelings as well as students'. What place have they got in learning? Does it help to write about them?

Feeling is a rich part of our lives, a very direct part, one that goes through our bodies as well as our brains. It's a part we're all equal in. Worth exploring for those reasons alone. But even if we come to learn for more practical reasons, if we want quick help with definite jobs, the feelings may be there. They are in the situations in your life that the jobs come from – applying for work, applying for money, claiming insurance, going to college, dealing with a landlord. You face those things as a whole person, feelings and all. And if the feelings are ruled out of order, they may block your thinking or your decisions or your learning. We'll look in part III at these practical jobs.

You have of course every right to decide when and to whom you show your feelings. It can't be an official part of what we do in teaching reading and writing: it depends on the relationships in the class, or with your tutor. As I travel round, I'm amazed by the information about themselves that people will trust me with. But maybe that's because I'm a stranger, and I won't be around for long. To start sharing feelings, you have to trust.

Is 'sharing' the right word? Or is the tutor there on different terms? It's true that it isn't an equal relationship: I've said what I think about that in the section called 'What's the tutor doing?'. But you're in touch: both parties need to be there as themselves.

1 LET IT COME THROUGH

PLAIN WRITING

Sometimes, very plain writing just shows feeling.

Still the same job
Sorting the trays.
I am working on nights.
Nights are too long.
– *Write First Time* year 1 no. 1.

INTO HOSPITAL

'Peter, there's a letter for you.
It says you are to go into hospital
next week.'
Peter looked at me,
mouth tightly shut,
for a moment, then said:
'Oh, all right.
I'll take my Bible story book
and my radio,
then I can listen to the boxing.'

I find the quicker I tell him
what has to be done
the better he gets used to it.
If he asks what they will do,
I explain as well as I can.
When my husband and I take him
we go early
to give him time to get settled in.
I put on his pyjamas
and get him into bed,
then talk to him until his dinner comes.

The doctor comes
and talks to Peter and us.
We can stay all day
but we have two more children
to look after
and have to leave soon.
There are tears as we leave
but, looking back through windows
gaily painted so that we cannot be seen,
he looks happy enough.
– *Write First Time* year 4 no. 2.

When we look at these pieces, and the others all through this section, we're moving between being readers and writers: seeing how other pieces of writing work, so we can plan and shape our own.

How does the feeling come across? In the first piece, it's because there is a rhythm. It's a down-beat, depressed rhythm that suits the meaning. The writer didn't work at this – this piece was taken down from talk. But you can listen for a rhythm in what you say, and let it shape what you write.

'Rhythm' may seem a strange word to use about words on paper. The rhythm is there, though, if we turn the words back into talk, out loud or in our heads. Some people say this slows your reading down. But for me, rhythm is part of how writing works.

In the second one, there's a clue: Peter's 'mouth tightly shut'. After that, it's all about not letting loose the feelings that we know are there for the people in the story. We know it because of the times when we've been through something of the same kind. Writing puts feeling across because people share feelings and understand each other's situation.

Is other people's happiness as easy to recognize and share as other people's upsets and sadness? I couldn't find writing that simply let pleasant feelings come through, without spelling out 'It was a wonderful day,' or 'We were so happy'. Do we find good feelings harder to believe in? Whatever the reason, I've had to go to an experienced writer, who has learned to show and not tell.

'Now then, Topsy, pop into thy bonnet.'
'I can't fasten my bonnet myself,' she said haughtily.
'Not man enough yet,' he said, trying the ribbons under her chin with clumsy fingers.
She held up her face to him. Her little bright-red lips moved as he fumbled under her chin.
'You talk – nonsents,' she said, re-echoing one of his phrases.
'That face shouts for th'pump,' he said, and taking out a big red handkerchief, that smelled of strong tobacco, began wiping round her mouth.'
– D. H. Lawrence: *The Rainbow*.

NAMING THE FEELINGS

This can be a good way in. The names we give to feelings are strong words. (Easy to learn to read and spell?)

One group I worked with did an ABC of feelings. We did it because we had tried to introduce ourselves to each other, and it felt a bit flat – all facts, all outside information. So we got round a huge piece of paper, and wrote on it at least one feeling for each letter of the ABC.

I won't tell you all of ours: try your own.

It could come out like this:
b is for brave, bored, blissful (adjectives)

Or like this:
f is for fear, friendship, forgiveness (nouns)

Then some of us picked a few feelings and wrote about them:

FEELINGS

I feel lonely when
I am on my own all the time.

I feel happy when
I have visitors in my flat.

I like to be friendly
with people
all the time.

I get angry with myself
when I do something wrong.
I get angry
when people upset me.
– Howard.

Or we just moved some of the words into a sequence that meant something: this was about our feelings in joining the new group.

numb timid keen silly happy.

You can also choose one important feeling to write about.

DAILY WORRY

The thing that makes me most angry
is when the governor is rushing
to get the work out.
This happens most every morning.
Then I get very nervous,
then I start breaking the needle,
then the machine cotton starts breaking
and don't you think
that rushing and dashing around
that we take a longer time
before he can get all the work ready/that he wants.
This is my daily worry.

Kathleen.

MIXED FEELINGS

Not all feelings come out one at a time. Try a situation where you have mixed feelings, and see if you can sort out what's in the mixture. Or a situation where one feeling follows on another:

When he was born, I wanted a boy, right,
and the nurses said it was a girl,
but that was a mistake.
When they told me it was a girl
I was so unhappy.
So half a minute later
they said it was a boy,
so that was a relief

They said he was underweight,
and they would have to take him away
as soon as possible.
When he was born,
I didn't see him for two weeks
because he was that ill, you know.
Later I saw him in the incubator,
but I couldn't touch him.
He went down to one pound,
and they thought he wasn't going to survive.
But he survived!

Even when he was five pounds,
he still looked so tiny,
but I was worried
that something might happen
because he was so tiny.
When I took him home,
I didn't know how to look after him,
but managed somehow,
But now he is six, he is a big man.
He's amazing!
– Shirley Elliot
from *Every birth it comes different.*

* You don't have to concentrate on your own feelings. Use pictures, and think about the feelings shown in people's faces, the way they hold their bodies and the gestures they make.

Or take a situation, real or made up, and think about what the people in it are feeling.

You'll be loosening up and using a body of words for human feeling, as well as practising something you could use in a bigger piece of writing.
* Do feelings have the same names all over the world? Do people expect the same feelings in the same situations all over the world? Or does it vary from one culture to another? (Think of feelings like pride and shame.) If your group has people from different countries, you can compare and find out.
* Have our names in English for feelings changed over time? (For instance, Shakespeare could write about love between friend and friend, or between people who had lived together for a long time as servant and master or mistress. Is love only used now for family or sexual feelings?) Can you think of changes in our lifetime?
* Try writing about the feelings involved in saying 'Sorry'.

NAMING WHAT GIVES YOU THE FEELINGS

TABOOS

I get scared doing this. They are strong words, like the names of the feelings, and so they have powerful hooks on our minds and memory. These are some of mine:

Home
EARTH
Bread
Night
people
Road
fun and music
CITY
PEACE
Water
BODIES
TIME
fire
SILENCE

I feel as if I'm getting near to taboos and magic – the things that you don't speak about because they are too strong, and the things you only speak about with the proper spell to keep you safe.

Traveller, you must set out
At dawn. And wipe your feet upon
The dog-nose wetness of earth.

The right foot for joy, the left, dread.

And the mother prayed, Child
May you never walk
When the road waits, famished.
– Wole Soyinka: from *Death in the dawn*.

* Have we still got words that are too strong to say or write freely? What are they? How do they connect with what we call 'swearing' or 'bad language'?
* A teacher in New Zealand in the 1920s said that the two most powerful words in the infant classroom are 'ghost' and 'kiss'.

WHAT MAKES YOU AFRAID?

MY FEAR

My fear/is what is going to happen
to my daughter
after my divorce is over.

That is what I am afraid of.
This is what the fear is in me,
Probably I might sound childish
How can I describe it?

I think for her
and I try not to show it to her.

David

FEAR

My fear is sitting in a room on my own
with my back to the centre of the room.
I am so scared
I think someone is going to hit me.
I sit in a corner of the room
and I feel safe.

I am petrified of heights.
I always think
someone is going to push me,
so I stand clear of long drops.
I can't even look down one storey.

I also have a fear of spiders.
They are creepy, scarey little things.
They go into your shoes.
You put in your hand
They scare you to death.

Jean.
– *Write First Time*: year 4 no. 4 and year 3 no. 4.

It can be hard to say what you're afraid of. Some of our fears are personal, hard to say where they come from; some are, unfortunately, very reasonable and close to reality. The world is dangerous!

You could talk or write about this as a group – either before you write on your own, or to make a joint piece of writing.

* With some fears, you can move from being afraid to learning or doing something. One group I worked with all thought they were the only ones worried about nuclear war. So they did a questionnaire to find out what other people felt. They weren't the only ones.
A group in South London has done a booklet about the bomb; it's called *Reign of terror*. It's written from a lot of different angles.

* Is it harder for men to say what they are afraid of?
* One way to turn round the bad feelings would be to write about a utopia – an ideal place; in this case, a place where you don't have to be afraid.

LOVE

Love is much harder to write about than fear.

It's one of the feelings that most of us borrow other people's words for.

'There's so much to consider.'
'There's only one thing. Do you love me?'
'That isn't the only thing.'
'Do you love me?'
'Paul, I can't – '
'Do you love me?'
'Yes, of course. But I – '
'Then be quiet about the rest. There's nothing else that matters.'

My love is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June:
My love is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.

You know that I love you,
and you must know, too,
That my happiest moments
are those spent with you,
For when we're together
or when we're apart,
You're first in my thoughts
and you're first in my heart

Have a Wonderful Birthday

It's easier to write about love for children, parents, friends? (Even pets.) But still not the easiest thing in the world. Perhaps we think we have to make the loved person look perfect, when it might be better to try to be exact about what makes her herself.

FOR JUNE

We were sitting in a cafe
I remember
talking over cigarettes and wine
and suddenly
I saw you as you really were
deep through
the woman you show to others
the cocktail smile and quicksilver laugh
of innuendo.

saw you young and girlish
flying eight months pregnant
cycling through the city's gloom
past the chip shops on the Old Kent Road
the ragtrade sweatshops and newsvendors' stands
with the smell of lemons
on your skin
the flash of Irish blue
in your hair and eyes

saw you warm and milky
holding me in your arms
and laughing
both of us laughing
heads thrown back
to the wind and sun

I took your hand
– or did you take mine?
and it was like a meeting of memories
and of potentials
as though we pushed away
those years of falsity
cut through
the pretence and competition
and I came running in through the backdoor
bursting with stories and poems
came hurtling out of school
clutching paintings and creations
for you
my tender critic
my sharp tongued connoisseur.
– Billie Hunter: from *Some grit, some fire*

SPEAKING INDIRECTLY

Useful to name the feelings; but you may decide not to use the names. They are labels to help you recognize what you want to write. But writing may move the reader more if it shows feeling, rather than telling us what the feeling is. Sometimes you need roundabout ways of doing this.

MY SON

If my son was a bird he would be a robin red breast.
If he was a flower he would be a daffodil.
If he was a piece of furniture he would be a table,
If he was a vegetable he would be tomatoes.
If he was a building he would be a church.
He would be reggae music
He would be sea water,
He would be a pineapple plantation,
He would be an orange
He would be a gate
He would be a running track.

Doreen

LAZY MAN

The lazy man is like a face basin
A white piece of furniture
That stays in the corner of the room
Keeping very still
Waiting for someone to turn him on
Waiting to be clean
Waiting for the sound of rats
Crashing behind the doors
Waiting to be bathed by the Bleach and Vim
Waiting for the lavatory chain to be pulled
So that he could start dripping
And dance to the sound

Mary

Doreen doesn't tell you how she feels about her son, but you know. Mary doesn't tell you how she feels about the lazy man, but you know.

(Do you? Compare and see if you all get the same messages.)
* You could try the techniques of either of these pieces. They are different, but they are both based on 'What is it like?'. We explain a lot to each other by saying what things or people are like or unlike: by comparisons and images. (There is more about this in section C4, 'Escapes and changes'.)
* You could try Doreen's approach on yourself as well as on someone else. What kind of bird, flower, furniture and so on are you?
* You could play with changing the feeling by changing what you compare something to. 'His eyes shone like . . .' – the stars? a knife? a searchlight? an oil slick?

Mary's is more complicated, because she develops the likeness, and every detail adds something. Give it a try, but don't be surprised if it's hard. Don't force it – play with it. You may want to come back to it later and do some more work on it.

There are other ways of letting feelings come through without naming them.
* You could write about what people say to each other – even when they are avoiding the subject.
* Or you could write what you would say to someone else. It can be the things you always meant to say but never got the chance. One of these pieces is a general statement to an imaginary person, the other is framed as a letter. Both writers concentrate more on what the other person did, and don't name their feelings about it.

I want to know why you make racism with me.
I thought you jealous with me.
I can't think why you are behind me.
One day you will leave me alone
by the grace of God.
Nothing is too hard for God.
Did you think you will please
for someone to be racist with *you*?
What you don't like done to you
don't do it to another people.

Madelaine: *WFT* Black Londoners Extra.

Or it could be a letter, even if it's the kind you don't mean to send.

'Dear Miss,

You won't remember me or my name. You have failed so many of us.

On the other hand I have often had thoughts about you, and the other teachers, and about that institution called "school" and about the boys that you fail.

You fail us right out into the fields and factories and there you forget us.'
Letter to a teacher: by the School of Barbiana.

* Feelings come out of actions, and turn into actions. Write about what happened, what you did, what other people did. For example, see Roger Wheeler writing about being a train driver in a crash: *WFT* year 3 no. 2.
* No need to make sentences, just pattern the words:

ALL NIGHT LONG
SUNDREAM

SUNSLEEP
NIGHTBREAK you

MOONFLOW are
STARFLIGHT asleep

MOONSET beside
LIGHTGATHER me

DAYFALL

Adrian Mitchell: from *For Beauty Douglas*

2 SPECULATIONS

MINE AND MINE ALONE?

Some people I've worked with don't believe that they can communicate what they feel. It's theirs and theirs alone. Some people believe they have to be completely spontaneous: working at it will make it not true, but fake feeling.

I disagree with both of these ideas, as you may guess. We are individuals, but we aren't so different that we can't recognize each other's feelings. We learned to know them from the body language and behaviour of the people we grew up among. We learned to name them by the names that other people use. It is possible to communicate these inside events – it's one thing language is good for.

And it is OK to work at this kind of writing, if you want to. Drafting and polishing and finding indirect shapes for your meaning don't make your writing insincere. The work we do – thinking or on the page – sometimes feels like finding something that wasn't quite there before, or making something you only had bits of before. It isn't forcing things into a shape that isn't their own. (If it is, it won't work.)

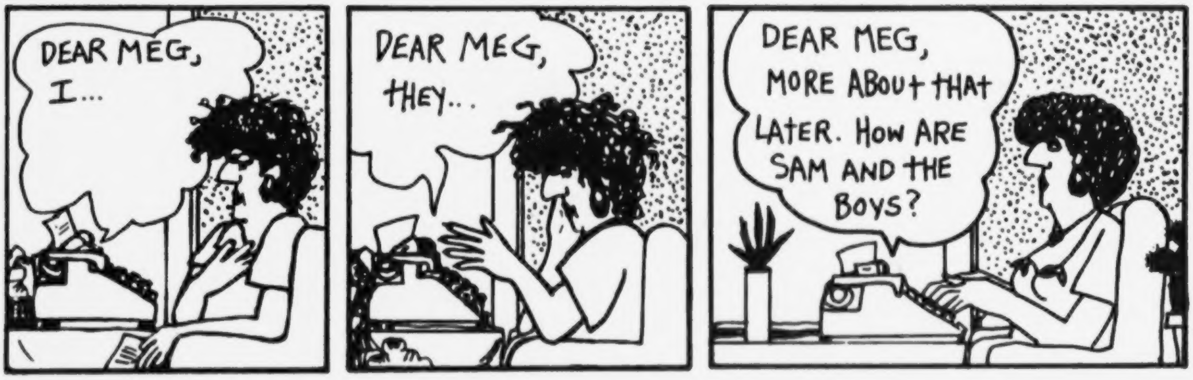
DIFFERENT CULTURES

Our interest in personal feelings and personal stories is typical of this time in our history, and also typical of Western Europe and its ex-colonies. In our time and in these places, we put a lot of stress on what is special and different about each individual person. That isn't the same in all times and places. We also have a particular understanding of the value of expressing feeling. I come from this culture, so I share that understanding, and this section comes out of it.

But as I've said before, in Section C1, 'Something about my life', people from other cultures may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with these ways of speaking. There may be different social patterns about speaking of personal feeling. It may not be something you want to write about. Or you may find that your culture speaks out much more strongly than English culture, so you feel very exposed.

Don't feel pressured or criticized. Every culture has its own way of understanding human life. Do what is right for you and your culture. It's up to you how much you want to explain and to bring in to the classroom.

3 HIDING FEELINGS


DEAR MEG, I...
DEAR MEG, THEY...
DEAR MEG, MORE ABOUT THAT LATER. HOW ARE SAM AND THE BOYS?

FORBIDDEN FEELINGS?

It's hard to write about feelings if you feel you ought not to have them at all., But – without getting into psychology – is a feeling ever just buried?

A POISON TREE

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I water'd it in fears
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole,
When the night had veil'd the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

William Blake.

Blake's poem might suggest how you can write about a feeling by turning it into a solid thing. His held-back anger is a tree with a poison apple. What could your anxiety or your pride be? (Or even your friendliness . . . all sorts of feelings get hidden.)
* Can you let your anger out? A lot of people feel it's too dangerous. Is there good anger as well as bad anger?
* Are there other feelings you think you ought not to have? Why is this? Is it because we're supposed to feel certain ways about certain things, and we don't always match up? (I once worked with someone who wrote, 'I dread Christmas coming'. That's a brave thing to say?)

EMBARRASSMENT

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

'I'm sorry we only kiss on special occasions'
'Just on special occasions'
But please – no putting of chummy arms
Around shoulders
No, we don't go in
For that sort of thing
Too emotional.
But only on special occasions.

Well it makes you like a bandit
Stealing the pleasures of another.
But really we do like you.
On special occasions – we even kiss.

Ron Barnes: from *Where there's smoke.*

* English people are supposed to be very slow to let their feelings show, and to be embarrassed by other people's show of feeling. Is this still true, or has it changed?
* There are funny as well as sad things to be written about times when we can't show what we feel.
* What embarrasses you? (It's a strange word. Have a look at its history.)
* Hugging, shaking hands, kissing, hello and goodbye . . . there are different patterns from country to country, and from family to family. Have you met people who do it differently from what you're used to? Did you like it, or not?

DECIDING NOT TO SAY IT

Sometimes the things that you find as you write are strong enough to take you by surprise.

A tutor in a group I worked with was writing about her grandfather. This is what happened:

'It's about my grandfather that we called "pop". I don't know why, but it embarrasses me to say that that's what his name was, it's such a silly name. But, my dad now wants himself to be called "pop"; and I didn't have a very good childhood, my dad and I were always at loggerheads, and I was remembering my own grandad and comparing him with my father, and basically just saying that my father wasn't worthy of the name.'

Writing can bring you to face what you haven't faced before. That may make you want to stop writing till you can deal with it; fine. Or finish the writing, but don't show it to anyone.

4 CHANNELLING FEELINGS

I started by saying that most situations in our lives carry feeling, including the practical situations that we may have to write for. I'd like to give some examples now to back that up.

PRACTICAL WRITING

NO MONEY

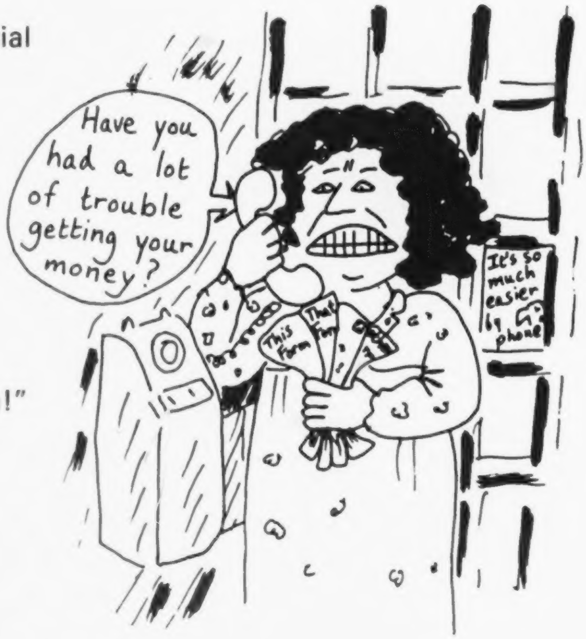
When I left work I went to see Social.
When I got there I waited about one hour
then I went up to the counter.
He told me I had to get a form
from the post office.
I then went to the post office and got a form
and filled it in and send it to the Social.
Why they couldn't give me a form at the Social
I do not know.

I then waited a week.
No money!
So I phoned up.
They said they had not received the form.
I said, "What form?"
"The form we sent you."

Again, "What form? I have received no form!"
"We will have to send you one."

I received the form 3 days later.
I filled it in
and sent it back the same day.
One week later, no money.
I phoned up again.
They had not received the form
so they sent me another.
I fill that in and send it back.

Three days later I received one week's money.
I phone up and ask about the rest they owe me.
They say, "We are trying to work out your money
and also your maintenance."
I then wait a further week, no money.
I phone up, they say, "About the form we sent you,
we have not received a reply."
Again, "What form?"
The girl on the other end of the phone asks,
"Have you had a lot of trouble about getting your money?"


Have you had a lot of trouble getting your money?
This Form
That Form
It's so much easier by phone

I could have screamed at her.
She asked me for my phone number
and said she would phone me back.

Half an hour later she phones
and says she has found all my papers.
They have been in the wrong department,
and if I would like to go down at 2.30
she would have everything sorted out.
and my money would be waiting.
I was down there dead on 2.30 and true to her word,
every penny was waiting.
By the time I have paid my board,
and what I owed out,
there was very little left.
If I did not have a caring family,
I do not know what I would have done!

Mandy

The Manager
DHSS
Front Street
Newtown.
Dear Sir,

I am writing to complain about the delay in paying me the benefit that was due to me when I left work on September 30th 1981 . . . .

The letter wouldn't go on in the same way as the story. But if the letter is what you need to write, you can look at the story as a draft for the letter.

The draft has sorted the facts out and got them in order. It has worked out what went wrong (and what went right). It also has its own voice – the voice of someone talking to people she knows. This voice lets feelings come through: exasperation, frustration, anger. It may not be sensible to put these feelings into the formal letter – it depends what you want to get out of it. But it may help that you've done a quite different draft first, where you let your feelings go, before you channel them for the person who will read the letter – who probably isn't the person you are angry with.

When we write more formally, we have to choose a style of writing that will suit the job. When we looked at these differences before, in Section B1, 'You do English every day', we used the word 'register'. The letter needs to be in a different register from how you would tell your friends. But it may be harder to work through to a more impersonal register if you haven't spoken out in your own ordinary voice first. (Sometimes speaking will be enough: you may not have to write.)

Here is another piece about a situation that arouses strong feeling:

FEAR CHANGED MY LIFE

About three years ago
I went to the off-licence in the evening.
On the way back home
I stopped and looked in a shop window
then I carried on walking.
I got to the end of the road
and noticed someone behind me.
He walked past me and looked back at me.
Then I felt something was wrong.
I was frozen in fear.
He stopped outside my flats
and lit a cigarette.
Then everything happened so quick.
From the corner of my eye
I saw his hand move towards me.
Then I panicked.
I ran into the flats screaming.
I fell. I didn't stop screaming.
When I got in
my top was covered in blood
but it was only from my finger.
Now, even in daylight
I can't stand anyone walking behind me.

Cheron McCann.

This is a good one to talk around together first. If there are both women and men in the group, are the women's feelings about this situation different from the men's? What are they – is it useful to name them?

You may have stories of your own to share. Do we feel differently when we find that other people have been through the same sort of thing? Does it help us to feel that what happened isn't our fault, or that we aren't to blame for feeling as we do?
* Is this a case in which feeling might lead to action? Whose feelings? What kind of action – will any of it involve writing?
Is it just us –the group members – who should take action, or should we be pushing other people to act differently?

* I can think of a few kinds of writing that might come out of this:
– A leaflet round your street or flats to ask women to come to a meeting about making the area safe.
– A letter to a local paper.
– Contacting, or starting, a Tenants' Association and following up things like bad lighting, broken lifts, no caretakers. (Who would you be asking to improve these things?)
– Contacting the police. (What would you be asking them to do?)
– Finding out about self-defence classes for women.

Don't feel you have to do all these things on this one subject. It's an example of how one kind of writing can be related to others. It applies to many subjects.

WRITING FOR STUDY

It may seem to you that feelings have no place here at all. (The strongest lesson I learned from school science was to write as if nobody was doing the things that happened: not 'We boiled the water', but 'The water was boiled'). But without feeling, what would lead us to spend hours – or years – trying to learn about something and make sense of it?

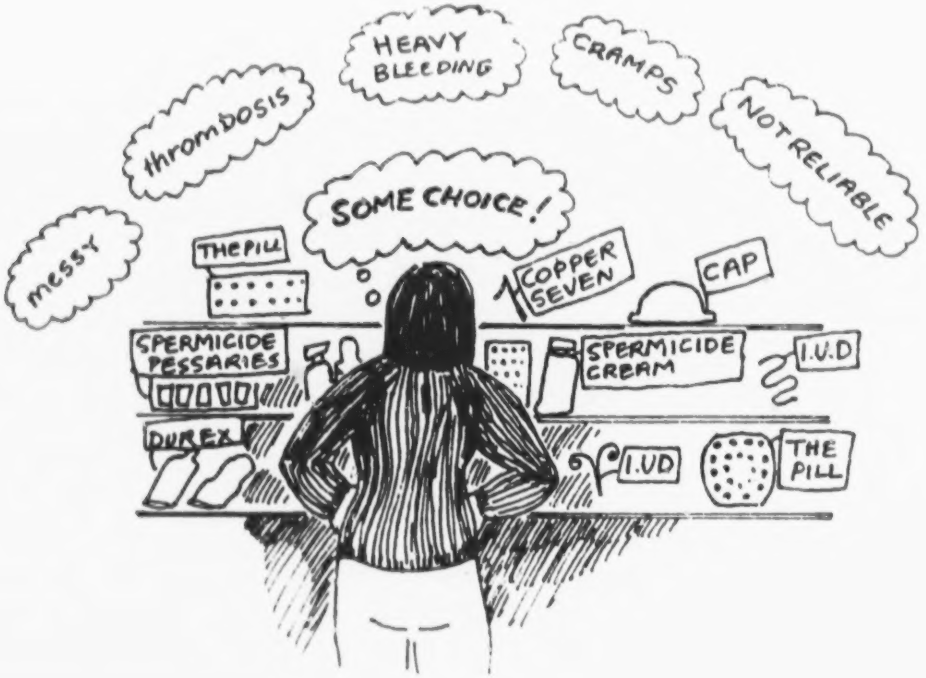
Sometimes, strong feelings are a sign that there is something worth studying. (Both of the examples I have just used in 'Practical writing' could be used in that way.) But there is a difference between statements about 'What I feel', and 'What happened to me', and statements about 'This is how things are'. Our feelings and our experiences may be evidence of how things are, but they may not be enough evidence on their own. To make the more general statements, we may need other information as well. But we can make just as bad a mistake if we leave out feelings that have every right to be part of what we are studying.

The question is how to manage moving from one to the other. Sometimes, as I argued about practical writing, the feelings should come out first. One student I worked with wanted to do a project on adoption. She herself was an adopted child. She wanted to write an impersonal, 'This is how things are' piece – she wanted to write with authority. But it didn't work, because her writing was still leading her to find and express the feelings she had about what had happened to her. I didn't see it clearly enough at the time, or I could have helped more. We were pushing on too fast to the end product. Now, I would suggest that she wrote more about herself, and understood her feelings better, before she tried to marry that up with other kinds of knowledge.

One way of explaining what I mean is to use the words 'subjective' and 'objective'. Subjective refers to things as you see them and feel them, and some things that are subjectively true are just true and can't be contradicted by anyone else. But there are other kinds of knowledge that we call objective: not depending on one person's point of view, using all the evidence that can be got.

If we're studying a subject, rather than talking about it among friends, we aim to be objective. But it's now recognized that nothing we see and understand is completely objective – the person watching always affects in some way the information that she takes in. Is this a drawback, or something that we can use to advantage? For many things that we want to study, it's right to keep ourselves in the picture. Instead of aiming to cut out 'me and my feelings', we could aim to move between 'This is what I have learned', and 'This is why I care about it, this is what it means to me'.

Sheona's piece, 'Proud to be Black', in *WFT* year 8 no. 2, has this quality. Have a look at it. So does this piece; don't be put off by the technical words.



CONTRACEPTION: A LIMITED CHOICE

I think the pill
is the safest contraception device to use
because it stops the body producing eggs.
I think I would feel
more comfortable with the pill
than with any other contraception.
The cap is a tricky one to fit
unless the doctor shows you how to do it.
It does not have side effects
except possible allergy
to the spermicide cream.

The disadvantages of the pill
are remembering to take it every day.
It may have side effects
which sometimes can be fatal
and cause depression, nausea and headaches
as well as a breakthrough of bleeding.
The safest coil
is a small white plastic object
which is fitted into the uterus

it also remains in the womb.
It can sometimes cause
pelvic inflammatory disease
and perforations of the uterus.
At least seventeen deaths
were directly attributed
to the effects of the Dalkon Shield.
There were people who thought it was
too dangerous for years
so they went to the manufacturers
to complain about it
and took out a law suit against the firm.

I feel reticent to go
to the family planning clinic
I've made an appointment
but I don't want to go back.
All the contraceptive devices
seem to have something wrong with them
and I can't face taking the risk
of damaging my body.

I visited the Manor Gardens Well Woman's Clinic
and talked to a woman doctor.
She prescribed a low estrogen pill
I feel relieved
and I have to go back for a visit
in four weeks time
to see if it will suit me.
Ingrid: from *Left in the dark*

V CONCLUSION

We've been analysing and describing and discussing; I'd like to end with something that we can read and feel. It's a poem, not because poems are the only way of writing about feelings, but because it's complete in itself. If you want to check back with some of the points that I picked up earlier in this section, you'll probably find examples of:
- rhythm
- word clues
- showing not telling
- a personal voice
- shared understanding between writer and readers
- images: like and unlike
- feeling being turned into things
- body attitudes and gestures

and probably a lot more.

It does no harm to become more aware of these things as you read. It may give you courage to try something yourself. But, of course, a poem isn't a bundle of devices; they are no use unless they make its meaning. Read and see.

NO RICKETS IN ROTHERHAM

I remember when
we first met,
shoulders squared,
when you put your arms around me
mortgages, gas bills, final demands
weren't real.

Now I come in
and close the door carefully,
take off the terrible overall
and we pretend that I haven't been to work.
The kids sit up to the table
and stare at their plates in silence
because you twist and distort
because the cornered dog in your eyes
snaps and strains.
We choke down our teas
and pray
that you don't start ranting tonight.

Inside my head I square my shoulders.

You sit in the same chair
day in
day out
smoking, looking at the wall
or you put your head in your hands
and cry quietly.

On open-evening
when I looked at Danny's book
under the title
"What Do You Want Most in The World?"
It said
"I want my dad to get his job back and
I want to bring sandwiches, not have free dinners".

And the Community Health man
says
"There are no rickets in Rotherham,
no evidence whatsoever of any illness
caused by unemployment . . ."
He ought to be at our house
at tea-time:
There's more than one way
of being crippled.

Ruth Shaw: from *1984: a first Trade Union annual*

LEARNING

I've chosen 'learning' as the topic for a whole section, for three main reasons. For those of you who are coming across this pack of ideas in an adult education class, it's a natural subject. You are learning now; you probably talk about how you learn, and what's hard about it, and how classroom learning connects with learning in the rest of your life. And you may want to go over and work out your ideas about what happened when you learned before, in school.

Even if you aren't in a formal class when you read this, there are strong connections between learning and writing. Ron Barnes put it this way when he published his life story:

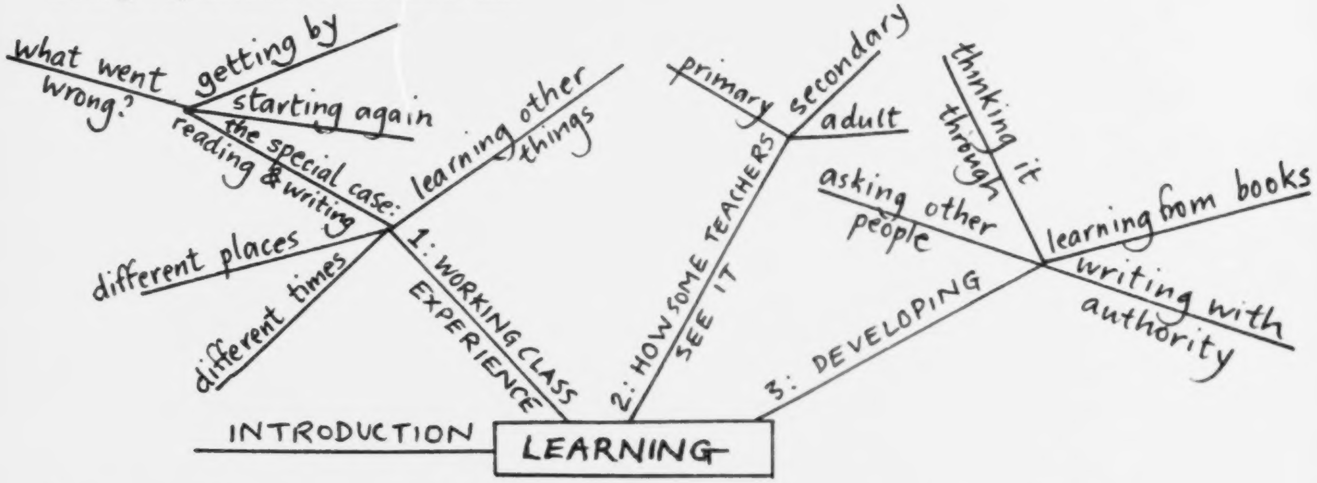
'Most people seem to be under the impression that they have to have a top-class education before they can write anything. Nothing could be further from the truth.'

School is where we encounter writing; many of us write more at school than we ever do again; many of us 'learn' from school that we can't write. Almost everyone who writes has some kind of running argument in her head with what writing meant at school; and our past experience affects how we learn to write differently later.

The third reason is that learning and education are excellent subjects to study, because we are involved in them ourselves. By studying them you can practise the different writing skills you need for other formal study. And what you can report and research from your point of view will add to what other people know.

As a bridge between writing from experience and writing for study, I've introduced some writing by teachers reporting and thinking about their experience. It may help you move out of seeing things through your own eyes only.

The main argument of the section is with the experience of working class British people in the British education system. There is one small look at different experiences in different places. Your group or centre could add to this.


what went wrong?
getting by
starting again
the special case: reading & writing
learning other things
different places
different times
1: WORKING CLASS EXPERIENCE
primary
secondary
adult
2: HOW SOME TEACHERS SEE IT
thinking it through
asking other people
learning from books
writing with authority
3: DEVELOPING
INTRODUCTION
LEARNING

As always, one main approach to helping you write is to offer you things to read that you may want to answer, or pick up ideas or approaches from. You don't have to take on everything in the section as something to do. There is a development running through it, but you should feel free to work at the parts that match up with your own development.

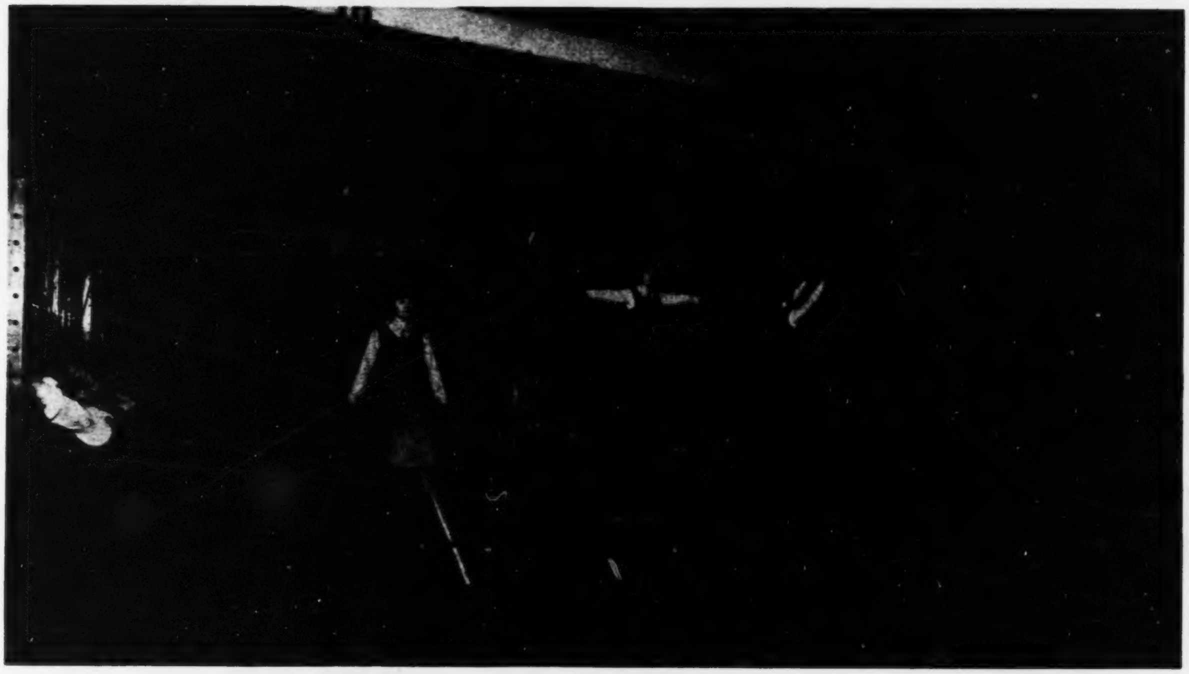
1 WORKING CLASS EXPERIENCE

DIFFERENT TIMES

We spend a long time at school – six or seven hours a day, 40 weeks a year, for 10 or 11 or 12 years, depending on how old we are and what the school leaving age was.

And yet many people, as they write about their lives, have very little to say about school. It seems to be more important for people for whom school was a beginning of big changes, than for people like Bert Healey, who can say, 'Unfortunately my education stopped when I was 14, and I forgot it all'.

But do we forget it all? We may forget a lot of what went on in lessons, but we learn something from a social experience that is so long and so organized. Betty Vodden writes about a school life that just didn't fit in with her home life: this was in the 1920s.



'I lived right opposite the school gates and I was nearly always late. I suppose the times which were most memorable were from about 12 years of age, and then I was staying up late to go to the fish shop to get thirteen threepennies and three pennorth for my brothers' and Dad's suppers, and they never came back until the pubs had closed. "But owing to the fact that you were late for school this morning, Lizzie Archer, you can forfeit playtime and go and stand in the hall with the other latecomers, and that slice of bread and marge you brought won't get eaten." And if Dad hadn't given me the outside batter of his fish last night I'd be bloody hungry.

Who the hell said the best days of your life was your schooldays. He couldn't have come from a working class family. Try arguing with Mum that your teacher said you ought to have a drill slip to play netball in. For one thing, Mum never knew what a netball was, it was a new one on her and she'd never seen a drill slip. But Mary Cummings had brought one in to lend me, that's good of her, but Christ, it barely covered my arse, and those silk stockings I'd pinched off sister Anne have got a big hole in them, but the show must go on . . . .

Lessons, I can't say I really enjoyed many of them. Oh yes! I liked singing and reading poetry aloud, no, not actually learning it, I suppose I've always had a stinking memory. We never had biology lessons, it was called science, and the only thing I ever remember about that was once seeing a photo of the perfect foot, and it was exactly like sister Anne's and I'd always thought what an ugly foot she had. Isn't it funny what sticks in your mind.

from *Some Grit, Some Fire*

For many, both looking back and now, the strongest lesson of school was discipline. This is so whether the writer thinks that it was useful to learn self-control, or whether she says that school stopped her doing things in her own way.

This young man, Barry, was at school in the 1970s, and talked about it on a tape four years after he left, with a teacher who had taught him. Don't be put off by the strong language.

'I didn't like being pushed around when I was at school, mainly because I felt I was too old or felt I was a man or something . . . . If a teacher says, "You've *got* to do this," you know – I've *got* to do rock all, you know, I am it, you know, you're not telling me what to do. So you're sat down there pretending to write and really you're chalking away on t'bloody desk.

I think a teacher's a person that wants to put intelligence into someone like a bloody factory animal. I think the perfect teaching system would be to have kids there with built-in impulses to be sat in rows, take it all in, write it all down and remember it for ever. I mean they're trying to make them like ruddy little computers. Teachers won't come true wi' you, never, and it's same at t'pit, bloody management'll never come true to you . . . .

There were some that wanted to work all t'time and have a little bit of a laugh, them that wanted to work all t'time and have no laughs, and them that wanted to just have laughs all t'time. I don't know which category I was in – I wanted to have a laugh a lot of t'time, but I didn't want to take advantage of you, and I wanted to do summat what I wanted to do, you know, like reading the books that you gave me to read. If I wanted to do summat and them lot were messing around it were a bit hard. If I were with a load of intelligent gits and I wanted them to have a laugh, you couldn't do it, you know. They were always on about, "Oh, you're going to go down t'pit, I'm going to get a right good job, I'm going to be a mechanic" – this, that and t'other. Half of them's gone down t'pit now. They haven't had a laugh at school.

from *Finding a language.*

* Barry wanted to learn – some things, some times, in his own way. Is this possible, inside a school system?
* He sees himself as being up against a *system* as much as up against teachers. Is this true? Is it more true of secondary schools? If there is a system, what is it designed to do?
* He also connects school very clearly with work. He lives in an area where there is a limited and clear choice of work after school, for men. For women it has always been different; and unemployment makes it different for many people now. What is the connection between school and work in your mind? Has it changed since you left school?
* What did Betty and Barry learn from school?
* If you want to find out more about how schools have changed over the years, there are some suggestions in *Further Reading*.

DIFFERENT PLACES

This group from Beauchamp Lodge in West London was talking at a weekend conference. They chose this bit of their talk to put in a book called *Each and Everyone*.

SCHOOL IN INDIA AND THE WEST INDIES

Betty: In India it's quite different, we had seven classes, you see . . . . At the fourth standard you take eight subjects. If you pass you get sent for junior Cambridge. But if you don't pass those eight subjects you couldn't take junior Cambridge.
Roland: That's like here with the 11 plus. If you pass the 11 plus you go to grammar school.
Amanda: What age was that, Betty?
Betty: At 12. I haven't been to school. I've never been to school. What I know, I've just picked up. And another thing in India, there were no free schools. So if you couldn't afford to pay you couldn't go to school.
Marie: I came out at the first standard.
Amanda: What age was that? About 7?
Marie: Yes, because my mum die. I was one year and I don't remember my mum. It was my old auntie who bring me up and I don't remember nothing. I like to learn a lot, because counting time, dates and all these things are important. That's why I'm trying to learn a lot with my children to see they go to school. And I give thanks that I am in a country that I can send them to school. Back home the people instead . . . even your parents, they cannot afford to give you the exercise books and the pencils, and they just left you out.
Betty: Yes, and they don't have to send you like they do in this country. Nobody notices if the kids don't go to school.
Amanda: Do you think it might be changing now? When you were children, they were still colonial places ruled by the British.
Marie: At home, have good education now. And they even sending people like you over there to learn and give them higher grade. Very good education there now. But in the old days my auntie couldn't afford, so she just took me along with her, she was a work maid in a hospital. So by that time, all that she was doing in the hospital was all that I had in my head.
Betty: In the olden days they never let women go to work, so the result was they always used to say women doesn't need education, she will just stay at the house. It's only now that women have to work that they're going to school. Years ago, in my time, women never went out to work. We got married very young, 14, 15. As long as she could cook, look after the house, that was all. Now women have to go out to work and if you don't have education in India you can't have a job. You have to pass a government exam to get a good job out there.

* Are the connections between school and work the same for Betty and for Marie as they are for people at school in this country?
* Are their experiences different because they were girls?
For more about other countries, see the International Supplement to *Write First Time*, year 8 no. 1, and many life stories.

THE SPECIAL CASE

I have started the section on purpose with writing about school in relation to family life and work. If there are problems here, they are problems that many people will share. The experience of going through school with difficulty in reading and writing is a special case within this wider pattern.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Most adults who are in reading and writing classes now have an extra element in their memories of school. Something must have gone wrong, or you wouldn't need to learn now, as an adult. Sometimes it's clear that it was an event outside your control that went wrong: moving a lot, war, illness, being needed to work at home.

Sometimes it was just plain fear that got in the way:

'I lived in the country on a small farm in Ireland.
I lived about a mile from the school.
I didn't go to school very often
because I didn't like school very much.
I couldn't get on in school.
It was pretty tough . . . .
It was the teachers really, they were so bad.
We were all together, about 20 or 30
in the school,
upstairs and downstairs.

The little ones were downstairs
and as you got about to eleven,
you went upstairs.
And that's when it started getting bad.
If you didn't know anything,
if you didn't know how to spell or read anything,
they wouldn't give you a chance.
They'd just beat you, really beat you hard
with anything they could get their hands on . . . .
Hit you with their fist, hit you with anything.
And I was so scared in the end
that I didn't want to go to school.
My mum used to have to drag me to school.

I couldn't learn, that's for sure.
I couldn't, I just couldn't.
It was blank. All the time.
Out of my mind!
The teacher'd be talking
and I just wouldn't know what he was on about.
I'd be thinking of something else.
I'd be thinking of when I was going to go home,
when I was going to get out of there.

Mary: *WFT* year 2 no. 4.

Sometimes, like Wesley in this piece, people feel how they behaved was part of the picture:

'At first school was all play every day.
So me and my friends made it a habit,
until we sorted out a handful of comedians.
Then it got worse.
I could be easily distracted,
so it made matters worse for me.
As time went on,
I noticed I was falling behind,
but having fun chewing gum seemed to be the life.
I was always in the middle of it all,
but I did not get caught as often as my friends.
I now think that that was what encouraged me
more than all . . . .
That was Wesley's downfall.

WFT year 4 no. 3

Sometimes, after a bad start – Kath had an eye operation when she was small – there was just a general feeling that not much was expected:

'It were just automatic that I'd go into a C class. I honestly can't remember much about the first couple of years in senior school, other than doing things like friezes – like in the spring you'd have daffodils all round. No actual work, but if there was a choir going on, we'd be put into that. 'Oh, C class can do that,' or 'C class can do games". We never did anything that we needed to. You were never given anything to tax you or even to try to do. On open days when they came round there would never be anything that was yours, so that you could say, "Oh, I did that or I did that". It was always A or B what did this. It just seemed we was pushed back for everything. I can't remember any teacher taking me on one side and helping me to read, helping me to do anything in that line.'

Kath Newsham: from *Where do we go from here*?

There are many different memories in print of what went wrong; one way to find them is to look through the indexes to *Write First Time*. But why write about these experiences? And why read about them? Am I just encouraging you to criticize schools and teachers? Isn't it better to put all this behind you?

Telling a story is a way of understanding what has happened. As you write or talk, you find out what you did learn and understand, even from a bad experience of schooling. You find out what it meant to you.

Sometimes you put things inside you rather than behind you, if you don't try to sort out their meaning. Then they can go on getting in the way of what you want to do now.

Reading other people's stories adds to your understanding. You have to make sense out of more than one set of events – the writers' as well as your own. We know from the editorial meetings we hold when we make *Write First Time* that student readers are keen to include other people's experiences of learning.

Nobody wants to attack teachers unfairly. People can tell the difference between a teacher who tries, who has good will towards them, who helps, and one who doesn't. It may be important to look past teachers to see what schools are for in our society, and how our experience fits in to that.

This is true for tutors too: they have been shaped by schools in their own ways. *Listening Ears* is a book that has the experiences and understandings of both tutors and students.

Many stories have been told, but there are more to tell, and more ways of understanding them that we have to find. One thing we don't know enough about is how women's experience of learning, and the messages they get from school, are different from men's.

GETTING BY

For those of you who have had to fight to learn reading and writing, it doesn't stop when you leave school. There is some strong writing about how people manage from day to day.

Dirtying my hands on purpose.
Because I came into London
not knowing how to read and write.
When I started work I did not know
that you had to sign for your wages.
I made my hands so dirty
my forewoman signed for me.

Sheila, *WFT*, year 2 no. 3.

People solve a lot of the problems without help. They teach themselves a lot, though they may not think of it as learning.

Work used to come in over the telephone. So the problem was writing down their addresses. The first thing I would take is their phone number, so if I couldn't write their address down, I could phone back again. I often thought of using the tape recorder, but I never got to that point. If you're very confident, you would say, 'Oh, how do you spell that?' or 'Spell it slow, don't rush.' Once you got it down you'd look it up in the A--Z. The A--Z is fantastic, it's very simple to work out, a bit like a dictionary, it's all logical.

Doug Meller, in *Where do we go from here*?

This writer reflects on what he has learned from his difficulties. No-one would want to say 'It's all for the best' – but can you think of anything you have gained from struggling with reading and writing?

I am sitting on a site at Highgate on my own, waiting for building material. I am sitting here writing this because I have nothing to do. It's my thoughts at this moment.

If I could write and spell, I wonder if I would take an interest in people as I do? Is it because I cannot spell that I do care?

I remember when I was active in the trade union, there were people who went to the union official for union advice, and because they could not explain themselves, the official didn't want to know. Then they came to me, and I would listen to the problem and work it out.

It made me feel good to help, and for people to need my help. Was I boosting my ego, or was it to compensate for my lack of reading and writing?

I wonder if I could read, write and spell with more ease, if I would have listened, or even given my time?

Tony. *WFT* year 4 no. 2

STARTING AGAIN

A favourite subject is 'The day I started adult classes'. People speak about how long it took them to get round to it, how nervous they felt, whether the welcome at the centre was good or bad, being introduced to a tutor, and, usually, how quickly they felt at one with the other students – all in the same boat. It obviously is an important moment in your life: at least, it has the promise of being, if the class is any good for you and you stay.

THE START OF ME COMING TO LITERACY CLASSES

It was because of my son,
he used to just say to his brother
'Leave Mammy alone,
Daddy will come in
and he'll teach us.'
And I used to be standing at the sink,
and I'd think 'Isn't that awful'.
I said 'Come on, I'll teach you.'
I sat him down and I just looked at him.
And he told me with his eyes
that he knew that I was in a temper,
and I was hurt.
And he knew that I didn't know the book,
so he just put it away.
And I told him
that his books wasn't my books
when I was going to school.

I went to the shop that particular day,
and I saw this card up in the shop.
And I knew by looking at it
that it was about literacy
(it was just instinct).
And it said No. 5 Churchfield Avenue.
Well we went for a walk that day
myself and the kids.
And I said, 'Well, I'll go in here
and see about the literacy.'
But when I went in
the lady thought I wanted to make
a phone call.
So I said 'Yes I do,'
so I dialled 10 and said
'Thank you very much' and out I came.
So that was one day.

The second day then when I went again
I was asked did I want to see anybody.
So I felt a bit relieved
and I said I wanted to see Maureen.
And she said 'Yes,
but she isn't here at the moment.'
She said, she will come and call up to my home
and I said 'Yes'..
She knew where I lived
cos she'd been up there before.
And I felt more relieved
that I could chat to her under my own roof.
It was like I'd won £100.
I was two days there when Kitty
who I never knew before came up.
When she came in
I really felt at home with her.
Though I was surprised when I saw Kitty
because I never see her before.
From that day to this
I really feel she's after doing a world of good for me.
And I am very grateful to her
and I hope and this is in my heart,
that I will be able to do something for her in return,
if I can possibly do so.

Sadie: from *WFT* year 6 no. 1.

It's a turning point between two ways of living. It's often a very emotional moment – and it's fine to share the emotion. What is harder to do, but may matter more in the long run, is to describe the change. What is different now? What happens to you once you start learning?

There's no magic wand for learning, and it's not always a steady move in one direction. Here is an account by someone who says a lot about the difficulty of learning. He is committed to carrying on, though.

THE PROBLEMS AND THE PITFALLS

Before I could read and write, I was full of confidence. I had absolutely no problems with coping with life. Each problem that came up was more of a challenge than a problem. It made life interesting.

Then I took a decision to learn how to read and write. For the first couple of weeks it was pure joy – a totally new experience. Then, when the problems came along, they were no longer a challenge. They were nightmares.

I found that after an initial burst of speed, I was struggling for every inch. Then I started losing confidence. I struggled on, but started to get mental blocks. I had headaches, I was always looking back to how easy and uncomplicated life was before. I was in a stalemate, not making the decision to go back but not making the decision to go forward. Not realising I couldn't go back even if I wanted to. I felt fog bound, and more and more inadequate. Not seeing any light at the end.

Then all of a sudden I realized what was happening: that I was having a total personality change. My outlook on life had totally changed, to the extent that even today, I don't know how much it has changed. I finally made the decision that there is no going back, only forward. There is nothing there to go back to.

Once having made the decision, the feeling is astronomical. I can now go ahead and learn to read and write, with a lot more confidence than I have had since I started learning. Now I think that I know all the problems that I face, and all the pitfalls. Now when I start to fight myself, I realize what's going on and I can cope with it. There's no longer two personalities fighting each other to get on top. There's now only one goal, to learn how to read and write.

Chris O'Brien: from *WFT* year 5 no. 2.

And what about success? There's plenty to say about that, but not much of it is coming through to print yet. I put some in section A13: 'Achievements'. Thousands of people now have experience both of small victories and of bigger movements. We need to know about this in students' words, to help us discuss progress together.

Most of the writing in this section is either personal story or personal statement. But people also use *images* to express how they feel when they find reading and writing hard:
'it's like being in a dark room'
'behind a locked door'
'being pushed back'
'in my shell'
'clamped up'
'you're condemned, you're like old houses, you just get pulled down all the time'.

But remember, too, Tony's image of himself as a listener. And here's one image for starting to learn:
'it's like waking up after a long sleep'.
* You could develop any of these images. But you may have to think about what you are comparing with what. Who locked the door, who condemned the houses, who put you to sleep?

(More about images in section C4, 'Escapes and changes'.)

LEARNING OTHER THINGS

We often don't recognize the wide range of things that we do learn. Here are some examples that may help you to recognize your own learning, and what you would like to learn.

AS A CHILD:

The reason why I never learnt the right things at school, I was brought up as the average East End family, as long as you can read and write your name, you can get by in life. There was always my family around, they all had their own businesses, so I was always up front to learn what was going on, from breaking down lorries to building a fence, or mixing cement. Why was school important to me, when I could do just as well in life, with my own judgement and learning?

Ellen.

AS AN ADULT:

in the U.S.A. in the 1960s

Questions of conscience are being raised. Questions of the war. Edward got to be seventeen or eighteen, and I began to wonder. Nothing political about it. I didn't want my son to go to war. I didn't even know where Vietnam was . . . .

A new young priest came to our parish. I said to him, 'So much of the church is concerned with the education of kids. We adults right now are not certain of so many questions and upheavals and changes. Why don't you have something for us where we could sit and discuss? I'm interested in adult education.'

After a few weeks, lo and behold. I don't know where he found these people. They lived in the neighbourhood for years, and I never knew any of 'em. We came together in the basement of the rectory. It was a shock to me to find out they were all saying, "Yes, we have felt isolated. We had nobody to discuss any of these things with. We'd sure like to talk about some of the changes."

We decided to start an organization . . . . There was a street that was made a speedway when they built the Kennedy Expressway. It was a neighbourhood side street that became dangerous. For years we were trying to get stoplights. Nothing happened. There was a motorcycle accident. Two kids were killed. We visited every house, and the response was overwhelming. Three or four hundred people came to our first meeting. We started our organization . . . .

Action. The word came into my vocabulary . . . . I began to think there are rules made by some people, and the purpose of those rules is not really order. The purpose is to keep you in your place. It may be your duty to break some of those rules. I liked it. I enjoyed it.

. . . What I'm beginning to understand is there's a human possibility. There are many, many possible things people can do personally. There are many possible things people can do publicly, politically.

Certain circumstances have to come together. How do you make them come together? That's where all the excitement is. If you can be part of that, then you're aware and alive. That for me is the dream, if you want to call it that. It's not a dream, it's possible. It's everyday stuff.

Mary Lou Wolff: from *American Dreams Lost and Found*

WITH OTHERS:

PAINTING A ROOM

I did not know how to paint, and it was the first time I held a paintbrush. I think i did very well so there is nothing that one can't do. It leave to you just to try. When you try you surprised to see that you can do it. It take five of all us women just one hour to paint a room. It was a new flat we painting. She was so happy to see we come and help her. I really enjoyed myself. I would like to do it again.

Lorraine: from *Our lives: working women.*

AT YOUR BASIC EDUCATION CENTRE:

SHORT COURSES:

Wednesday evenings have short courses all this year, on Ireland, Newspapers, Russia, Local Government, and First Aid. We've also had some daytime courses this term – one on Basic Science, and one on Alternative Medicine, in which we learnt about acupuncture (and Harry got a needle stuck in his knee), homoeopathy, and herbalism. Lots of people came. We hope you enjoyed them. Any ideas for future courses?

from *Left to write* no. 13

* What are the most important things you have ever learned? How did you learn them?
* What would it be really useful for you to learn now?

2 HOW SOME TEACHERS SEE IT

INFANT SCHOOL:

I think play is very important to children. I don't mean mucking about, I mean concentrating on playing, that state when they are involved in sorting out what's real. There's too much contrived play in infant schools . . . 'Play with this now, it's your turn'. Just because the teacher is obsessed with organizing and afraid to see what happens if she just keeps watch and leaves them alone to relax. And you don't have to keep feeding kids with lots of information, they are naturally little scientists . . . .

I taught them phonics so that they can learn to sound out new words. A lot of things they can learn through what they write and through asking each other. I found out by accident that if you don't have dictionaries it helps, because they're asking each other, and if they can't spell something you can say, well sound it out, and that way they gain confidence and it's more a social thing.

I see reading as a tool. If you don't get to the stage of being able to read, so many doors are closed to you. There aren't many kids who aren't able to read, they're just scared that they can't do it. You can tape stories that they tell, make up plays together. Read them a story you think they might then be able to read to you. It's obvious that their enthusiasm relates to what they can master, and that isn't so obvious later on.

Brian Simon, from *Working Lives* Vol. 2.

SECONDARY SCHOOL:

This was written by a teacher who was working with others on a research project about teaching school students with reading problems.

From his earliest talk about himself on one of the rare tapes, we discovered how defensive his tone was, how humiliated he felt. ('My little brother can do it better than me . . . I feel shown up'). This humiliation had deep roots. Speaking of reading in his primary school he said, 'When it was your turn, it was time to go home'. Fiona continued, 'If I try to talk to him about how he *feels* about reading, he is very reluctant to discuss it and only wants to get on with reading aloud. In class his attitude to me is very ambivalent. In front of his peers he is always struggling to keep control of events. He will form a group or play cards or sing, or announce his intention of working and settle down to copying from a book for a double period. If I set him any work requiring original thought or risk of spelling mistakes, he will either refuse it or get a more literate friend to go through it with him, so that it is perfect when it is handed in to me. He once made an excuse to tear up his exercise book after making a mistake.

In the special reading room, he was a good attender at first, then he became less conscientious if there was something more interesting elsewhere. Most of his antagonism to me drops away when out of his class. I am there to hear him read – as he often tells me in no uncertain terms. He will tolerate someone else reading for a short time, but cannot bear to discuss reading or anything else that will reveal anything about himself other than the tough image he projects for class consumption.

I see reading as his only chance of gaining the confidence to break away from his role of gangster and football fan, and to prove to himself that he can use his intelligence for other things besides the domination of his class. I haven't found out what prevents him reading fluently except that he has such a low opinion of himself that he must *think* he is a non-reader.

from *Achieving Literacy*

ADULTS:

This is an extract from the notes I have been keeping as I have been travelling around the country, so it's not an ordinary class. I was a visiting teacher, and Gillian was in to watch and help, as well as Janice the group tutor. For each two hour session it took me another two hours to write the notes. But it was the only way to keep track of what I was doing.

25 MAY 1982

Numbers were down – B. came in a bit late and sat in the other room working on his own – more of that later. It started off with L., S. and then R.T. No typewriter ribbon, so L. couldn't go on revising her piece about her jobs on the typewriter (which is what she prefers), so she did it by writing. S.'s piece has been typed by L., in jumbo, and he got into Letraset, and worked through for a good while with encouragement from Gillian, me, and anyone else within reach. Got quite keen. Then looking at other people's stuff in books and magazines, started saying, "Where's the photo going?" and had the idea of its being more pages – a book! Show it to people! So we showed him Tim's book, and he likes that format. *Need drawings done.* M. also got interested at that point – a book each? publish them? – joke! but not so: Gillian showed her a lot of student books.

M., R.C., C. and B. had come in by then. R.C. and C. took their typed pieces and took themselves off for most of the evening. M. wanted to talk to Gillian about one of her daughters. When she had done that we looked through her two bits, I read the long one in an order I thought made sense, then typed the last half which is the more scattered about, while she wrote some more (with Gillian's support) on "Living on the dole". She's shy about this and won't write about the tensions at home. Building up quite a bit of pride in what she's done.

B. is still on the solitary battle with his pride. He wouldn't come in because he felt he would be interrupting something, and wouldn't be assured that it wasn't so. He took the beginning of his story and Gillian's notes, and went on on his own, but in the direction of his reading difficulties rather than his jobs; fair enough; we had a talk about it as well and it sounds as if he's doing a lot of studying of word lists. Can't intervene much. I raised the idea of taping and it might be worth doing next time, if he can see it as an alternative satisfaction and not just a cop-out on writing it himself. Discuss with Gillian and Janice.

These extracts were not chosen to be typical of anything. Nor are they to suggest that it's only in secondary school that learners and teachers have real difficulties. I chose them to show students something they don't get much chance to see: different ways in which teachers think about the work they do and the people they teach.
* Do you make notes on your classes? Or write reports? If you did, do you think they would be the same as your teacher's?

3 DEVELOPMENTS

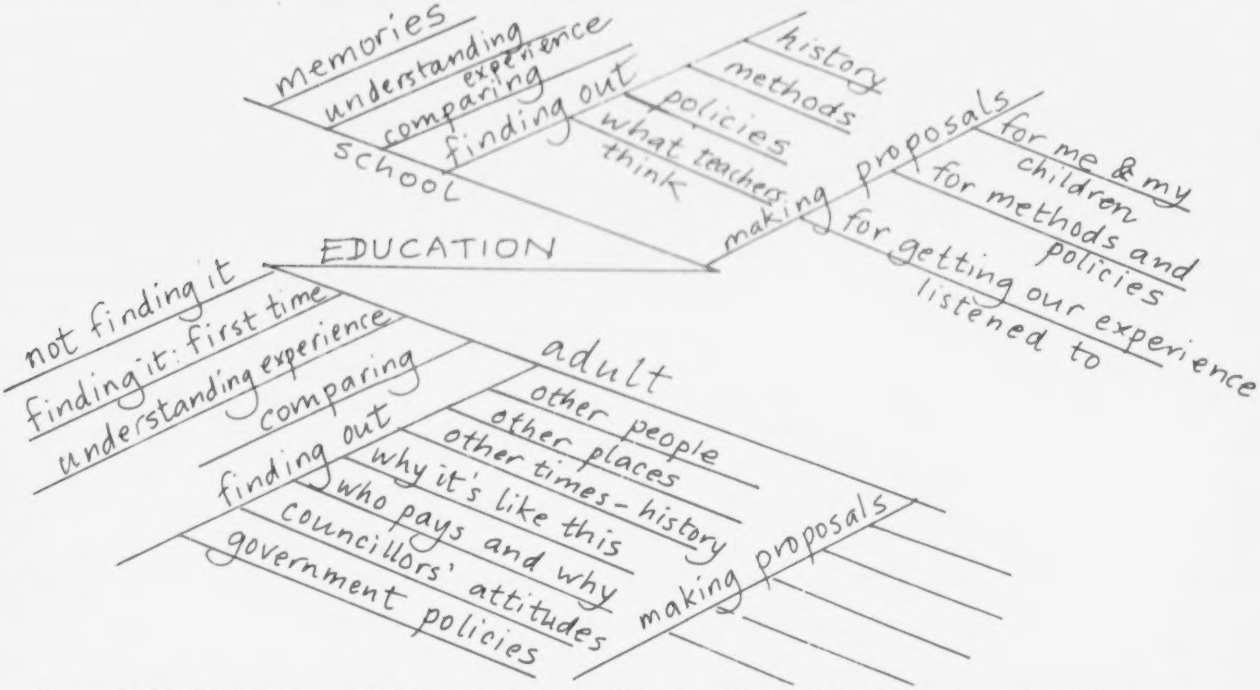
As well as being something to write about from experience, 'learning' and 'reading and writing' – as they are and as they have been – are good subjects to study. If you want to move towards more formal study, or if you just want to use your intelligence on a subject close to you, this can be a good area to start in.

There are uses of writing that are special to studying. Some of them seem formal and frightening – like essays. But there are things about writing that help you study.
– Writing can hold more than your memory can.
– It can keep things when the book or the person or the TV programme you got them from has gone away.
– It is easier to refer back to than, for example, a tape recording. (You don't have to refer to it in the same order as it happened in.)
– It helps you put things at a distance, see them in a new way.
– You can move it around and re-arrange it.
– It takes you to the *unknown reader*. This fact in itself may change the kinds of thing you can say.

For examples in this part, I've chosen only work by people who started out in basic education classes. I don't want anyone who reads this to say, 'If they can do that, they can't have as much to learn as I have'. They did have as much to learn: the point is, they learned.

I'll describe what I think is going on. You may find it useful to come back to these descriptions when you think what kinds of writing you might do. If the descriptive labels stop being useful – if they start tying you down – then change them.

You can learn to use writing in these ways across a whole range of subjects. I'm using the theme of Education as an example. Here is another map, this time to suggest the variety of things you could do with the theme. It's my map; yours will be different.


memories
understanding experience
comparing
finding out
school
history
methods
policies
what teachers think
making proposals
for me & my children
for methods and policies
for getting our experience listened to
EDUCATION
not finding it
finding it: first time
understanding experience
comparing
finding out
adult
other people
other places
other times - history
why it's like this
who pays and why
councillors' attitudes
government policies
making proposals

It can feel frightening, to think you might do all these things. A lot of teachers don't do them, never mind students. Don't feel pushed. Do what you can do. If what you're best at is telling things as stories, do that. Stories are one strong way of putting your understanding across. But remember as well: no-one was born able to do these things. If you want to, you can learn.

ASKING OTHER PEOPLE

Isobel decided to work at a book to tell people what it is like to have difficulty with reading and writing, and what it is like to be a student. One thing she wanted to put over was that students have minds of their own

Here is a chapter from the book:

5. A PROBLEM AT WORK

When I went away with the group one week-end we discussed discrimination. Most of this chapter was written by one of the tutors, from the tape of our discussion.

The question was: Do people discriminate against those who have problems with reading and writing?

I asked the students for their experiences and one student, Alex, had a job with a mail-order firm. Her work consisted of making up orders for so many pairs of jeans, socks, etc., and she had to write down "so many size 16" etc. and add up a total.

After six months, during which no comment was made on her work, she was given her cards and told that she was not quick enough at the job. No warning had been given, and she was not offered any alternative job in the firm. It was suggested that she should go to evening classes for writing or arithmetic, but there was no offer to keep her on while she did this.

Millie thought that six months was a reasonable period to give anyone to settle into a job, but she agreed that Alex should have been given some help during that time. Everyone agreed that Alex should not have been sacked and that the least the firm should have done was to transfer her to another job.

Many literacy students have responsible jobs like Millie. Her job at a hospital included ordering various items that the doctors needed in the operating theatre, also cleaning materials and equipment for making coffee for the doctors. This was only part of her job. She made coffee and did some light cleaning as well.

When she started this job they handed her an order book with lists of the items used and she had to mark the items needed. With help from her sons, she began to recognise the words she needed to know. She has established herself after working thirteen years in this job as being really efficient at it. She thinks the fact that she was given time and not harassed or over-supervised helped her. All the group thought that employers could be helpful and that literacy problems have little effect on the performance of many jobs. It was agreed that employers should give positive help and encouragement even when there is no direct profit for them.

I would like to see people who have difficulty in reading and writing getting time off work, a day release from their employment. Literacy is a problem at work and I do think that employers could be a little more helpful, particularly to the younger person who has just left school as well as the older person. Something is now being done by the Borough of Southwark and St. Thomas' Hospital who have agreed for people to have paid release twice a week for literacy. This is a good start.

from *Through the door*

I've given you a whole chapter because it's a whole argument. How did Isobel get there?
* She first had to *ask the question*. She had to know that it was sensible to ask about problems at work.
* Then she had to ask other people – to *interview* them. She chose to do this as a group discussion, but she could have asked one person at a time.
* Then she had to *summarize the answers*. She says she got help from a tutor to do this. But she will have been drawing her own conclusions about what was said that was important; so she's got her own summing up to check the tutor's version against.
* Then the group came to some *conclusions*. Do you agree with them, or does your knowledge lead you to different conclusions? How would you back up your conclusions in argument?
* Finally, Isobel makes some *recommendations* for what should happen. If you are investigating a subject, it's good to find that it gets you somewhere – that your knowledge can suggest action that can be taken.

THINKING IT THROUGH

Robert wrote this piece after he had been to a conference.

He had visited classes apart from the one he learned in, so he had more confidence that he could talk about *how things are* and not just *what happened to me*.

WHAT CONTROL?

It is fashionable to talk about Adult Basic Education as to do with people taking control of their own learning. 'Students choosing and producing their own materials.' 'Students are learning what to assess and how to do it themselves.' 'Students can choose from a range of different learning opportunities.' 'Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning.' 'Develop independent learning.' 'Encourage students to suggest the following week's topic for discussion.' 'To organize and plan their own work and to seek out knowledge and information for themselves.' Some references from newsletters and a Handbook about Adult Basic Education.

This sounds great, but in practice this is not the case. I know of very few examples of this practice around and I have visited and experienced a lot of Adult Basic Education. I began to think seriously about this at the N.F.V.L.S. conference and what follows is my attempt to justify what I say.

When people come along to a reading centre they get asked, 'What do you want to do?'

They know why they have come along, they understand what they are doing.

What happens next? The tutor starts them off and gets the person rolling along the learning process. As time goes on, if you ask the person learning what way or method s/he is using to learn, the answer you will get is, 'I go to a group and we do some reading out loud, some writing and some spelling.' Sometimes you do not even get as much as that for an answer. The answer to this question is not just peculiar to people who have just recently started to go to the centre or scheme. It does not matter how long the person has been going, you will still get the same answer.

It is too much of one person knowing what the other would like to know and keeping it that way.

I feel the tutor should explain why they are showing people the particular way of learning, e.g. when someone has learnt a spelling rule, but it has not been explained fully why. Then they try and relate the rule to another spelling and it does not work. Being shown or doing something which is totally useless to the person learning. This can cause frustration in the people learning.

The tutors should say the reasons behind the methods. Also to say why the tutors feel that the person would benefit using a specific way of learning. Why can't they be more open about the way a person learns and say it to them?

If someone can explain to another what they are doing and make it clear to that person, they themselves will get a greater understanding of what they are doing. Perhaps a lot of tutors cannot do this because they themselves do not fully understand what they are doing.

I feel that this is the reason why people are not taking control of their own learning and one of the major problems why people do not help out as much as they could in their centre or schemes, like management committees.

Robert Merry.

* Again, the decision that shapes the piece is *asking the question*. It should be said that this doesn't always happen at first draft stage. You may need to write around your subject till you know what question you are asking.
* Robert's paper helps us think about *evidence*. He makes a statement about what 'it is fashionable to talk about', and then backs it up with quotations from different places. He then make another statement – that students often can't explain the whys and wherefores of what they are doing –and this time he backs it up with his report of what people have said to him. Are the two kinds of evidence both as good as each other? Do they prove his points?
* He *meets other people's arguments*. He can see that someone might say 'It's only new students who don't understand what is going on', so he gets in first with his argument against that.
* He *uses examples* to make it clearer what his general points are.
* And he finds that his experience leads him to a *theory*: in fact, two. If people can explain what they are doing, they will understand it better themselves; and perhaps tutors do not explain well because they do not understand.
* Robert, like Isobel, makes *recommendations*. Do you agree with them?

LEARNING FROM BOOKS

Isobel and Robert have been adding on to their own experience and knowledge without making much use of books by other people. But for many purposes, books are where our additional knowledge and experience and ways of thinking will come from.

But two things can go wrong when you start learning from books. You can lose sight of what you want to know, and you can lose sight of yourself.

It's very rare that a book you read for information is going to be arranged in exactly the way that you want to get the information. You need a lot of practical skills to get it out: you need to use contents and index, to skim, to scan through for bits that connect with you, to explore new uses of words.

You also need some organizing and thinking practice. How do you keep all the new information you're getting? How do you sort out the bits you need? How do you spot something you're looking for, and how do you spot something you didn't know you were looking for till you saw it?

There are no short answers. The long answer is practice, and talking it over as you go.

If you start writing for more formal courses, you can feel under pressure to drop yourself out of the picture and write impersonally. You may also be under pressure to change the kind of English you use: to change the register. (Look back to section B1, p.7 for this word.) Terry talked about this in the discussion on 'Different English', section A9.

In the end you may have to do this – it may not be in your control. It may be what an exam or a course requires. But on the way there, do you have to drop 'me' straight away?

I think not. I think that what we saw in Isobel's and Robert's work was that they had set themselves a question that they wanted an answer to. If that gets lost, why are you working at what the books say? Your question may go underground for a bit, while you take in some new facts or points of view; but the best reason for writing, wherever the information comes from that you use, is that *you* have something to say.

When we start writing out of book information or other outside information, we may feel that what we have to write is an Essay. The Essay, as it is usually done in school, is a way of telling a teacher back what she just told you. You can't add much that the teacher doesn't know; you can get it wrong. There is a particular register for essay writing that you may not feel comfortable in. I think this is not a useful kind of writing for an adult student while she is practising, even if you have to deal with it in the end.

Pauline wrote this during the Write First Time Summer School in 1984. She was with a group that were studying the history of reading and writing.

DEVELOPMENT OF WORDS FOR WRITING

Writing is used to tell each other messages and make everyday communications and record important events.

The development of writing has taken place over thousands of years from pictures to today's written language. If you go back to the beginning, it is very interesting, as our language is mixed with words from different countries. As a result we get words and letters which aren't spelled as they sound in our language today. Nearly every word has undergone some change, and meanings have changed. We have borrowed words from different languages. Each area has various dialect words with different meanings and sounds, and over some time letters have passed out of use as change has taken place.

Pauline.

I don't think this is bad writing; I wouldn't use it if I did. I hope Pauline will forgive me if I say it shows some signs of a struggle with the Essay.

It's a struggle that she is on the way to winning. She has chosen her information out of a great deal more. She has got it into her own words and in an order we can understand. And it works round to being the answer to an interesting problem.

Pauline's work is a draft. It's not a first draft – she needed that one to get the information sorted out. But the next draft – if she wants to do it – might start with the question: 'Why is English spelling such a mess?' or something like that. That would pull all the later stuff together, and maybe suggest that the first couple of statements aren't really what the piece is about – except that the second sentence starts to talk about *change*. Maybe that's the centre of it, and not my question at all.

You have to wrestle twice with what you know: once to know it, and once to see what you know it for. Does that make sense? You have to digest what you take in.

(That's an image: is learning like eating? More about images in the next section.)

* Isobel, Robert and Pauline take the responsibility themselves for what they have written. But they have all used other people's help – tutors and other students.

Do you think you will have more courage to write beyond your own experience if you do it together?

WRITING WITH AUTHORITY

I've suggested that education is a good subject for you to study, because you can write about it with authority. You know some things that no-one else knows.

This last piece has authority. That doesn't mean it's right in every detail; just that the writers have to be taken seriously. It was written by a group; and this may have helped them to place the personal memories inside something else. It may have helped them to generalize.

This piece uses the techniques I have described: asking a question, gathering information (from interviews and from other places), digesting it, using it as evidence for an argument, meeting some of the objections, making recommendations. Can you see all that going on?

Has anything changed since 1977, when this was written?

AS WE SEE IT

There is no average age for people who come to literacy projects, which shows that the problem has been around for a very long time.

With the start of adult literacy programmes in the last few years the problem has been highlighted. Most of the people who come forward are from working class backgrounds. The problem is not just confined to the working class but the middle class seems to be able to overcome it with more opportunities. This highlights the double standard in our education system.

Here are the attitudes of three people attending one literacy project, the age group is mixed. 'Looking back, I had problems changing over from the i.t.a. system of English at the age of 8. Living in inner-Liverpool, the houses we lived in kept being demolished and I kept changing schools. There seemed no overall planning of my education. I seemed to have no contact with my teachers.'

'Coming from a large family, my main problem was whether or not I had shoes to go to school. There was no communication between my family and school. We had an average of 45 a class and the teacher could not keep control of the class, never mind teach. I feel very bitter about the waste of my ten years of what was, to me, torture.'

'At 11 we were segregated; all the bright kids went to colleges, the rest were left in a rundown school with bad teachers. We spent the next few years at the same desks doing nothing. I would have accepted this in my ignorance, but the last year we moved to a newly built school and then it dawned on me – seeing all that I had missed out on. At 15 I left, hating all the bastards that had closed their eyes.'

ACE
No Cuts
PLEASE SAVE OUR CLASSES
WE DON'T WANT NO MORE CUTS
WE NEED HELP
PLEASE SAVE

The double standard in education that applied to us as children is still with us now as adults. It is easy to go to a night class for painting, woodwork, car maintenance, cookery and other hobbies. Why? Local Authorities are willing to pay teachers to take night classes like these. Yet with so many unemployed teachers no one is willing to pay for one-to-one basic education and they drag their heels forming small classes. We don't want a hobby or a pastime. What we want is our right – to be able to read and write in a literate society. Is this too much to ask? Because we lack the basic skills we don't have the work opportunities that others enjoy. Yet there are several million of us paying taxes and rates. Why are individual tutors not paid when they are needed so badly?
It is a great step to come out of the shell of ignorance seeking help. Why should we then have to wait for tutors because of the shortage of trained staff?

Those who suffer in silence continue to suffer.

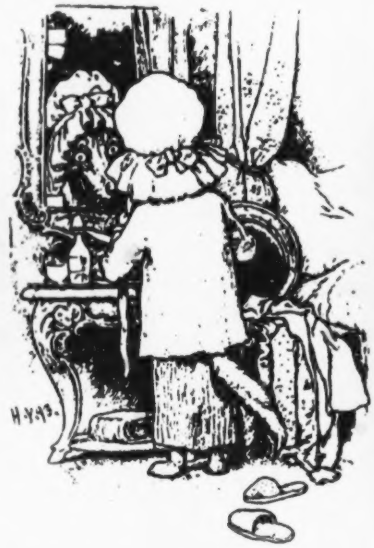
Liverpool students: from *WFT* Year 3 no. 2.

ESCAPES AND CHANGES

This section is about changing your way of seeing and saying. It's about images, metaphors, word play, changing points of view, fiction and fantasy.

We're brought up to tell the truth: most of us mop up a great deal of fiction. Fiction isn't the same as lies, though there have been times when strict people saw made-up stories as wicked, and other times when they saw them as a waste of time.

But not all truths get told in a straightforward way. Every human society and culture has its proverbs, folk-tales, myths, roundabout ways of saying things. Every culture makes up stories, and finds ways of letting people speak from other points of view than their own, whether by putting on a mask and becoming a god or demon, or by tales of talking animals, or by making actors into mythical figures in Hollywood.

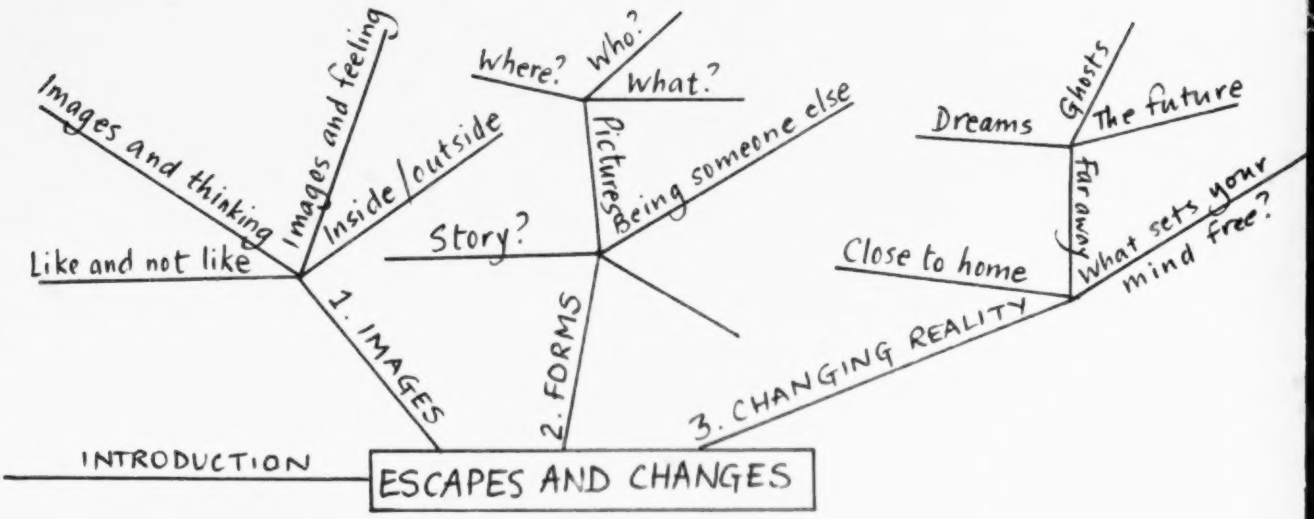


It's hard to plan for getting someone else's imagination to take off – or even your own. But I don't think it's just 'inspiration' either. Your inspiration has to make its way out through practice in some form of expression; it might be dancing, making things, or using language. So what we're trying to find is useful kinds of practice.

In this section I'm offering three things. One is a look at how some of these imaginative changes work; first of all, how images and metaphors work in language, and how writers make use of them. Second, we look at how some of the forms of writing can be jumping-off points for your imagination. It may be changing the frame that sets you free, as much as a wild idea or something deliberately fantastic. Third, there are some ideas about how we deal with real life through these various escapes and changes

I haven't put in so many * action points in this section. You may read something here that will get you going straight away, or it may only find its way out into writing months later. You'll probably have more luck if you can experiment and play and try things out.

The map of the section is:


Images and thinking
Images and feeling
Inside/outside
Like and not like
1. IMAGES
Where?
Who?
What?
Pictures
Being someone else
Story?
2. FORMS
Dreams
Ghosts
The future
Far away
What sets your mind free?
Close to home
3. CHANGING REALITY
INTRODUCTION
ESCAPES AND CHANGES

1 IMAGES

LIKE AND NOT LIKE

When you want to describe something that your listener does not know, or something new, you say what it's like. You grow out from old meanings to make a new meaning.

This isn't just done by one speaker after another; it's the way languages grow. They extend old words to new meanings, as well as borrowing or making new words. When the meaning of a word stretches or changes – when enough people start using it in a new way for this new way to be widely understood – we are saying that the new meaning is like the old meaning. Sometimes in straightforward ways, sometimes in quite fanciful ways.

You can trace some of this process through the dictionary – particularly a historical dictionary, that dates the introduction of different uses of a word. If you look at the various meanings of *head*, or *hot*, or *leaf*, or *root*, you'll see what I mean. *Leaf* is the shortest in my dictionary, so here it is.

leaf . . . 1. Relatively broad flat organ (usually green) of plant springing from side of stem or branch or direct from root . . . . 2. Single thickness of folded paper, esp. in book . . . . 3. Very thin sheet of metal, esp. of gold or silver . . . . 4. Hinged part or flap of door, shutter, table (also used to extra section inserted into expansible table) . . . .

Leaf has grown extra meanings that explain the look and shape of things; *head*, *hot* and *root* stretch their meanings in more abstract ways. But they all start from something in the natural world, and move on from there.

So when we use the parts of language that aren't just labels for things we can see or touch or hear, we are often using images: comparisons or metaphors. They're vital to us. ('Image' is a complicated word. It doesn't mean 'picture', though perhaps it starts from that special human capacity to picture something in the mind that isn't there at the time. I started to define it as 'a way of making connections that are in the way we see things, rather than in reality'. But I don't like to say that what goes on in the mind isn't real. Deep water. Talk it over and come to your own understanding of what an image is.)

Some images become traditional, like saying that life is a journey, and we then build on it for other images: 'It's not all plain sailing', 'the last few months have been an uphill slog'. Some are new – slang, or poetry, or words that didn't exist before. There are some good slang examples in the 'handles' people make up for themselves or each other when they use CB radio. Handles are nick-names that tell you something about the person: Grease monkey, Tuppence-ha'penny, Penguin, Tin-ribs.

Spot the images in these phrases, from one day's newspapers:

' . . .attempts to stop the strike getting off the ground.'
'The Belgians were kept in the dark about the cargo . . . .'
'Someone might try to force your hand. Play for time rather than take risks.'
'No-one can afford to sit on the fence.'
'Dennis Skinner's usual far left views . . . .'
' . . . property developers feathering their nests.'

IMAGES AND THINKING

Sometimes an image can open a new area of meaning.

Man has built his-self a world in danger.
You get a load of potatoes,
you dig a hole and put them all in together.
Some grow good, some grow crooked.
some grow down and some not at all.
But if you plant them spread out,
they grow good.
People's the same.

Ronald Pye, in *Speaking Out*

This image helps Ronald say what he means. It also tells us what lies under what he means.
main point: we are overcrowded in cities.
underneath: people can grow better or worse according to the way they live
looking at nature can help you think about people and social life.

But if you're using an image, you want to keep your mind open for the ways in which the two things you are comparing are *not* like each other. To make a silly example of it, we wouldn't think much of it if Ronald started arguing that people need digging up and moving once a year because they are like potatoes. That's too silly to happen; but it's easy, once you've found an image, to try to make it fit at too many points, or to use one likeness to argue that other aspects are like each other.

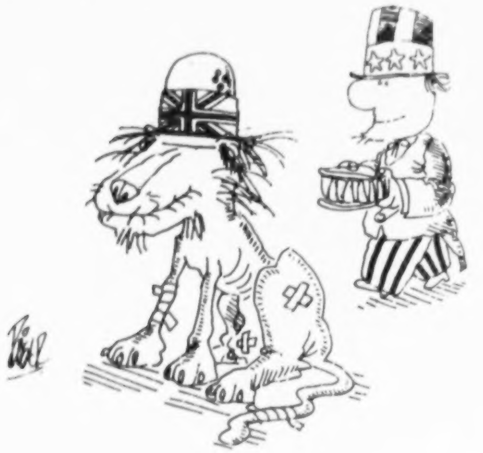
Try it. Many people have compared education to a ladder that you can climb to get on in the world. Tony, in WFT year 2 no.1, compared education to an obstacle race. If you talk these images over, you can decide where they do and don't fit your experience of education. You can also start to ask, what follows if I think like this?

What follows from our images of learning and how our brains work? 'My head is very hard.' 'I can't get it into my head.' 'What she said went right over my head.'

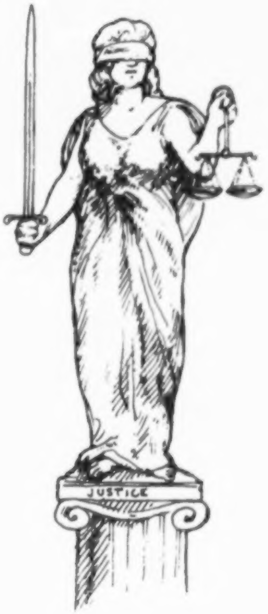
I'm dwelling on this because images can get us stuck in a way of thinking that starts to feel true just because it is familiar. We need to keep ourselves critical. Images, in pictures as well as in words, are strong propaganda. What follows if you believe this image?

'This firm is just like a family.'

Or this one?



Or this one?



IMAGES AND FEELING

Images carry feeling as well as ideas; both old images and new ones. The older and more familiar they are, the stronger the feeling may be.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou are with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 23

Even if this isn't, for you, a religious truth, it's full of images of rest, comfort, being looked after. If you want to look into them, you'll find 'Life is a journey' in there again, and 'dark is bad, light is good', and 'rest is in the country', and a lot that go deep into how we see things.

But people can make new images too, to carry their meanings. We looked at one in Section C2, p.10: Mary's poem, 'The lazy man'. Mary's meaning would not have come out so clearly or with so much enjoyment without the image. And I say 'enjoyment', even though her feelings about the lazy man aren't so sweet.

Here is another example of a piece of writing organized by one main image. Again, I wonder if the image lets the writer go into feelings and thoughts that she couldn't speak about more directly. What do you think she is saying? Is the black box just a fantasy with no definite meaning, or is it an image? In other words, what is it that is like the black box?

MY CHRISTMAS STORY

It was Christmas Eve and there was one child, a boy, waiting for Father Christmas to come. But first the boy's mum said 'Get into the bath and then have your tea and then bed'.

Well, Christmas day came. The boy got up first, before his mum and dad. He opened all his presents. Among them there was a box. There was nothing inside the box but black inside. He did not think about it until his mum and dad got up and the boy asked them, 'What is it for?'. They said they did not know, nor did they put it there. Well, they all looked inside the box and they all did not know what it was for. Well, they thought nothing about it for a week later.

Then one day the boy got the box out and looked inside, well, a good long look, and he heard a lot of people inside the box. The people were saying, 'Do not look inside the box as it wili take you inside the box'.

Well, he shut the box and went to tell his mum and dad, and they told him, 'Do not look inside the box'.

The boy's dad took the box and put it under the stairs in a cupboard, so that the boy could not find it.

Well, months had passed, the boy had found it and he had a long look inside the box and he ended up in the box. He asked all the people why are they in the box.

'Well,' said the people, 'we got the box on Christmas Day and each in our turn got the box for Christmas, and we all took a long look in the box and then we could not get out of the box. We can look out of the box but when you are outside the box you cannot see us inside the box. You can hear us in the box but you cannot see us in the box.'

The boy's mum and dad do not know where the boy is and they do not know how to get the boy out of the box.

So if you get a black box do not look inside the box.!

Margaret Pickersgill: from *Not Written Off* 2.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

We live with an everyday face, everyday behaviour, everyday words. But all of us feel that there's more of us than meets the eye, or the ear. One strong reason for writing is to let some of this inside come outside.

I get depressed sometimes, but I just think, 'Pull yourself together, you have no-one to talk it over with, so get on with it and stop feeling sorry for yourself.' Imagine me in Africa, facing a lion on heat, and he made for me. Now then, what should I do? Go forward or run? It would be the mood I was in at the time. I felt frustrated. I looked right, then left, but with me being on my own, I felt like a white-faced clown or a mad dog. But the mad dog I knew would not help, so what next? God knows. Some strong drink to make me feel like the lion. So here goes; face him now or never.

Bridie Griggs.

* The image of inside and outside is a starting point in itself. You can try it through a formula:

'I seem to be . . .but really I am . . . .' or 'When I feel . . . I am like a . . . .' (an animal? a kind of music? a kind of weather?) This is the idea that lies behind what Bridie wrote; as you can see, it turned into a whole imaginary scene.
* You can choose a picture that represents something about you. Is this my desk? Or the inside of my head?

You can simply say how different you feel inside.

There is a left side, a right side,
a front and a back.
A top and a bottom, an outside too,
but where, O where is the inside of me?

There lies minute beneath all the years
of you mustn't, you can't,
the do's and the don't's, the will's and the won't's.

Oh, to be able to sing like a lark in the sky,
to capture a sunset and place it on canvas
to pleasure my eye,
to be free as a bird flying on high,
staying only where fancy takes me,
I know not why.
To dance on the daffodils
in the warm summer breeze,
and swim with the fish in cool tinkling streams.

All this is there just waiting to rise.
There will it stay, until I find the key
to unlock the door which will let out a piece
of the inside of me.

Edith Brunt.

Depending on your beliefs, you may say that the 'inside/outside' relationship is, or isn't itself an image. It's close to talking about 'soul' and 'body'. For years, people talked about the soul being somewhere inside the body: they used images like a person living in a house, or a bird in a cage, or a prisoner in a jail. Most of these images joined themselves to the idea that death gave the soul freedom to be itself, or to stop being a separate thing at all and join with God. What images can we use if this isn't our belief? In Edith's poem, it feels as if ordinary life with other people makes the outside, and the 'real me' lives inside.
* What would happen if you walked out of your 'house' and shut the door behind you?
* What have you got inside you? Who have you got inside you?

2 FORMS

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A STORY

Most of the imaginative work we come across is stories. (Most of it we don't read, we see it on TV.) So when people start writing imaginatively, 'stories' are what come to mind.

There's a lot that goes into a story. It takes a lot of making, to put an imaginary world together and make it move. On the way to that, we can try making one or two of the imaginative changes, without feeling we have to make a whole story.

You can move yourself to a new place. Our heads are full of imaginary places. (Some of them come out of other people's fictions – like TV advertisers' tropical islands, or soap opera ranches, or gangster movie city streets.) Being in a new place is a strong image for being in a different state – better or worse, or just different. As you write it, concentrate on the place and not yourself. You will come through anyway.

Where to go from here? It's bigger than a crossroad. And nothing like a major junction. There's a signpost with no signs. Tall and white. It's sunny. Nothing in sight. I can see no fields, no animals, but I know they are there. Lots of roads branch off from this point, although I only sense four. I don't know where they go and I don't care. I like this spot.

I'll give each of my roads a destination point and their paths I'll map out on route . . . .'

Sue Vodden, in *Some grit, some fire.*

I won't show you all Sue's places – make your own. (But read hers later.)

You can take yourself to meet a new person or people. Again, we do this all the time. What we often do is to take someone we have seen in passing, in the street or on the bus, and make up what happens to them and what they are like. You can either stay in your own shoes and describe, or else get inside the person's head and speak as if you were her or him.

Or you can try a new train of events. Terry found this useful when he wanted to write about something that could have got heavy if he faced it straight on.

What would happen if the National Front got in power? I think that they would send every black person home, except me because I am the King of England, don't ask me how I got to be king. There's no trains running, no buses, the country has gone and died. The next day the big unions called for a strike. The country is now at a standstill. Two weeks went by, and the country is still at a standstill. I called for the great big white National Front leader, to tell him, not to ask him, but to say that I am the only black person in the country, and am just about running it myself.

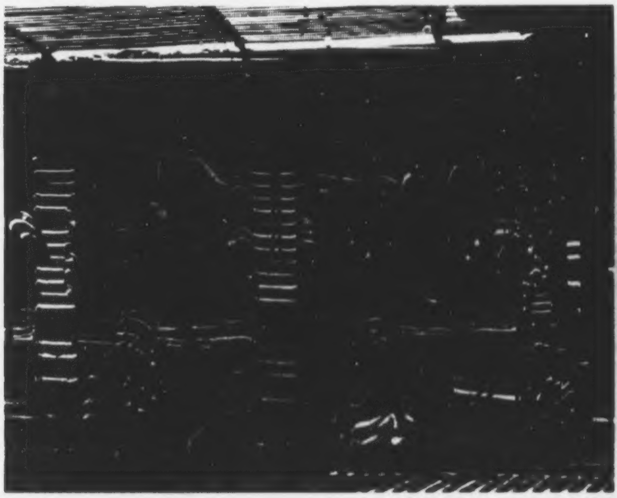
WFT year 4 no. 1

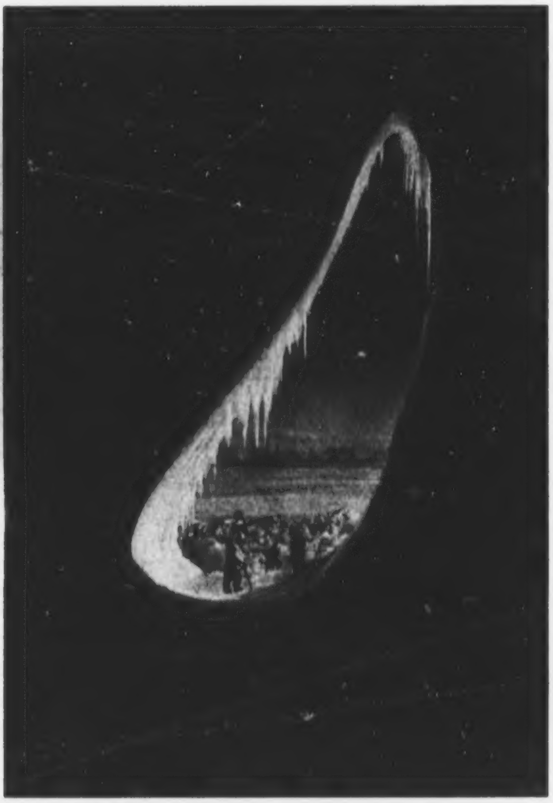
(This probably isn't his last word on the subject. One use for writing imaginatively is that we can try things out and see how much of them we want to go on living with.)

USING PICTURES

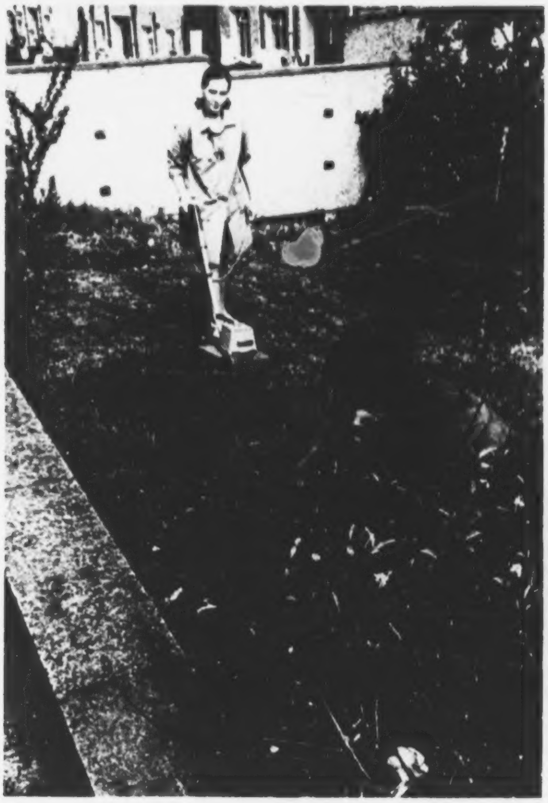
For each of these starting points, pictures can be a help. Get together a good range of photos and other pictures and you may find they help you start.

WHERE AM I?





WHAT'S GOING ON?



WHO'S THAT?

My name is Bear. I'm a tall man, about 6' 4". I'm a man with not too many morals. If I did, I don't think I would be here telling you this.

The people around me are like vultures so I never stay too long in one place. I always soon find these stupid kids thinking they're some kind of "Billy the Kid".

You know the people who I mean. You might have them in error. Well you either kill them or you get shot in the back. They don't care about anything. That's alright by me.

My life hangs around my waist, and in my left hand. I don't ask a lot, just for the town folks to leave me alone . . . .

BEING SOMEONE ELSE

I've suggested before (section C1, 'Something about my life', p. 20-21) that shifting to the point of view of a different person is a good way to move a block on writing about something in your own life. But there are other experiences and ideas you can explore in this way too.

David did this almost by accident. I asked his group to bring something from home to write about, and he brought some photos. They were of Weymouth, where his wife's mother lives. He started talking about her, describing her in what I have to call a mother-in-law-ish way. But when he wrote, he moved closer to her view point, and her story began to sound enterprising and adventurous.

The story began one morning eighteen years ago. Maud got out of bed. She made a cup of tea for Gordon and herself, then set about the housework. Maud turned to Gordon and said she was fed up with living in Sheffield. She decided to pack up and go. She went to the railway station and got on the first train that came in. It was a straight through train to Weymouth. As soon as Maud saw the view she decided to stay.

The first thing Maud had to do was to find a place to stay. She found lodgings near the station. The second thing was to find a job, which she got at Pontins, in the kitchens preparing food for guests. She worked there for about six months, then came back to Sheffield.

She could not settle, so back to Weymouth she went, leaving Gordon in Sheffield to pack their belongings and join her in Weymouth . . . .

Another good way to make this shift is by trying a play. You can do it on your own, but a lot of groups have found it's easier to do it together – or at least to start off together, maybe with a session where they act out situations and make up what to say. You can get help with this, if you think you need it, from people who work in the theatre. (Try a local Theatre in Education group, or your Regional Arts Association for suggestions.)

Or you can do it on your own. Many groups have, especially at Writing Weekends, when there is more time; but also in ordinary class sessions. Remember 'The Baby Batterer' in section A10? Chris, the tutor, said:

'I think people tend to feel that they have to write from personal experience, because it's not true if they don't and it's hard to get into making things up; and yet as a group, people do it better.'

John Glynn, whom you met in section A12, agrees with this. He also thinks video is a big help, to perform a play of this kind. It sets up a new situation so you can behave differently.

'We just had a morning's video session on a writing weekend, and we just sat down and said, "Look, this is the equipment, this is how you use it, what shall we do with it?". It was just after the election, and we started thinking about health, and how the health service is going to deteriorate. So we thought, we'll have a real dragon as a receptionist, and somebody crawling in, and the receptionist saying, "Get an appointment next week". It just built up like that, with dialogue.

People have got to go out of themselves. It forces people out, and then they've got to go into a different angle. Specially if you're saying, "Right, you're the doctor, you're the nurse" – you know – and they've got to say, "Oh, I'm not Fred Bloggs, who's terrified of doing this, I'm the doctor who's very calm and clever." And I think it's worked.'

Don't feel you have to have video, though. What John is talking about is putting yourself into a situation where you call on things you know, but don't usually say. You know a lot about other people's behaviour. When you're being yourself, for example, you may often be on the receiving end of bossy behaviour; but if you play the boss, you know what to say! If you're a woman, you know what to say if you play a man chatting a women up. (Does a man know what to say if he's playing a woman?)

One last hint about plays. We've all seen a lot of plays, and they have some set formulas and conventions. Some of them are useful: for example, since films and TV came in, audiences have got a lot better at understanding short scenes, changes of time and place, picking up information indirectly. Some of the conventions may cramp you down, though: like the kind of climax or twist to the ending that stories have, or the things people are supposed to talk about or not talk about. Use them if you want to, but feel free to chuck them out. Your play may be more exaggerated, or more realistic, than most of what we see. It can still be true.

POEMS

A poem can be about anything – there aren't any special 'poetry' subjects.

It needs to be organized, to have a shape, but it doesn't have to rhyme. If it rhymes, the rhyme should be useful, not a prison for the meaning.

It can use a lot of images, and make patterns with them, but it may not have any at all.

It may use a regular rhythm, or it may end its lines wherever that helps the meaning.

It should enjoy language. It should have its own music when you read it aloud (or aloud in your head).

It should invite you to see something in a new way.

It's a kind of writing that talks to readers in general, not any particular reader.

You'll never know how scared I am, with my education in English Literature, writing that down. Never mind me. Have a look at these.

DAWN

When the sun comes up in the morning
rising slowly
the sun comes up
it's the sun coming up.

There's no dawn in Poplar.

– Richard Brown: from *No dawn in Poplar*

SMALL CHANGE

He had the pennies of her soul
Now she's gone thrifty
Pursing her lips
He's gone shifty
Counting the tricks
Like a cat, with its tongue
In the dish on the floor
Trundling it empty towards the door.

Lotte Moos: from *Time to be bold.*

DOUBLE BASS

There is a tree in the orchestra.
It talks softly, like a bear.
It stands holding its hat by the rim,
Bashful.
It has quiet conversations
with drums and paint brushes.
It is a humble instrument.
The people who play it are shy and serious
They close their eyes to hear.
Sometimes playing is excruciating,
Their fingers run up and down like spiders.
Sometimes everything is gentle
They close their eyes to hear,
Touch the strings gingerly.
The wood talks,
It murmurs like a person in their sleep
when you wonder what they mean.
It can't be fierce but it can keep a secret.
It looks solid
But it sounds sad sometimes
And stands on one leg.

Sue May

THE CLASS GAME

How can you tell what class I'm from?
I can talk posh like some,
With an 'olly in me mouth,
Down me nose, wear an 'at not a scarf
With me second hand clothes.
So why do you always wince when you hear
Me say "Tara to me Ma" instead of "Bye Mummy dear"?
How can you tell what class I'm from?
'Cos we live in a corpy, not like some,
In a pretty little semi, out Wirral way,
and commute into Liverpool by train each day.
Or did I drop my unemployment card
Sitting on your patio (we have a yard)?
How can you tell what class I'm from?
Have I a label on me head, and another on me bum?
Or is it because my hands are stained with toil,
Instead of soft lily-white with perfume and oil?
Don't I crook me little finger when I drink me tea,
Say toilet instead of bog when I went a pee?
Why do you care what class I'm from?
Does it stick in your gullet, like a sour plum?
Well mate! A cleaner is my mother,
A docker is me brother,
Bread pudding is wet nelly,
And me stomach is me belly,
And I'm proud of the class that I come from

Mary Casey: from *Voices*

Sometimes they come all in one go: you know what you're doing and you do it.

Sometimes they take a lot of work, crossing out and re-thinking. You can only try. You won't be pleased with everything you try, but every good one is a bonus.

Write for music, if a song seems less frightening than a poem.

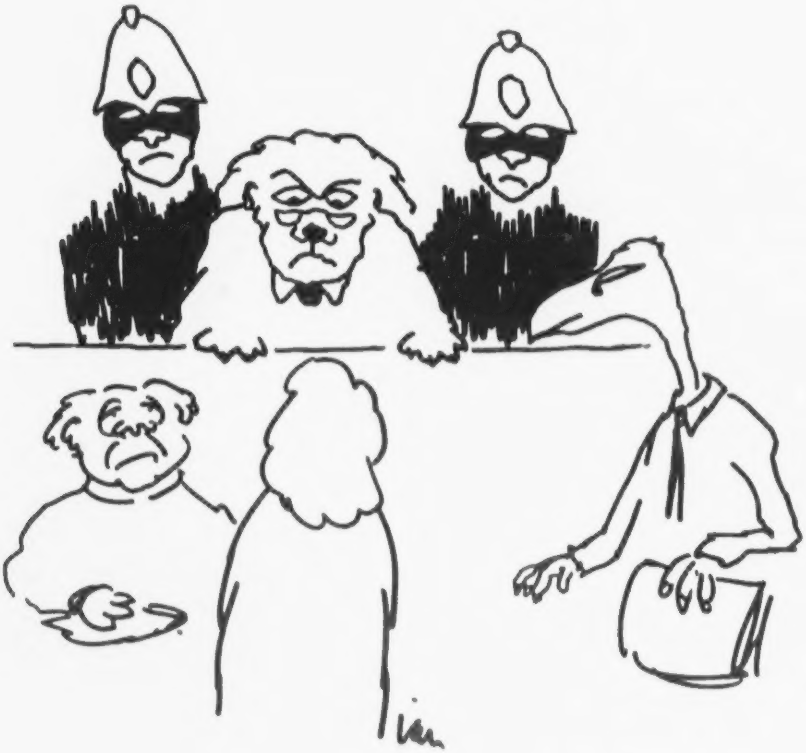
None of the four writers above is a famous poet. They belong to local writers' groups, and when their work has been published, it has been by these do-it-yourself groups. There's a lot of good reading coming out this way, and a group like this is somewhere to go if you feel like working at writing with other people . (See 'Further reading'.)

3 CHANGING REALITY

CLOSE TO HOME

Real situations may need an element of change before we can write all we want to. You can dress up what happened, give it a dash of caricature: this was Vara's day in court.

. . . Few minutes after I was called in the court room. I enter the court room and saw the magistrate sitting on the chair and there were two of his colleagues sitting on each side of him. To me they looked like wild lions, and front of them there was a clerk. He looked like to me a monkey who does all the dirty work for the courts. Also there were a few solicitors and at the time you might think that one of them who's looking after your case he might save you from them, but to me they looked like they were feeding them.!
– WFT year 4 no. 1



You can change the ending to give things a more satisfying turn. Leah did that when she added this on to a story about a bag-snatching:

'The police said they had picked the two men up, because they had attacked another woman, but unfortunately they didn't get anything from her as she was a judo expert, and she threw one over her shoulder and gave the other one a clout on the head; as she threw one he broke his arm. She was given a reward by the police.

Leah Hood: *WFT* year 6 no. 4

Or you can make a full-blown story out of something that's basically true. As I said in the section on life stories (C1, p. 21), it's sometimes easier to deal with memories if you put this little distance between you and them. For example, it may help the funny side to come out. This is from Gay's story based on the lives of people she grew up among in Liverpool:

Aunt Mary came to tea, and Uncle John. He looked terrified of her. Jack took John for a drink after they had had their tea.

'Are ye coming for a drink, Mary?'

'Indeed I won't. You better only have one, John, as I don't want the smell of drink all night.'

Young Jacky is up whitewashing in the cupboard where the gas meter was. He turned the knob, so the gas went out.

'Have ye got a penny, Aunty Mary, till me Dad come in? Me Dad takes all me Mam's money.'

'No, I haven't any money at all.'

Jacky is spraying his aunt's red hat with whitewash.

'Have ye a penny, Dad? Aunty Mary had no money. I'm up in the gas cupboard, dad, give me a penny and I'll put it in.'

On went the lights. All the kids started laughing. Young Jacky pointed at his Aunty Mary's hat, he had to leave the room. John says, 'Come on, Mary, I think it's going to rain. We will get home before it starts.'

John kept two paces behind his wife as the rain started lashing it down, and all the whitewash came all down Aunty Mary's face.

'What are they all staring at, John?'

'Nothing, Mary, I think they liked your new red hat.'

When she got home and looked in the mirror she screamed at John and called her nephew all the names under the sun. She sent Jack a long letter claiming damages for the hat.

Gay Davenport

FAR AWAY?

Judging from what is sent in to *Write First Time*, the three most common kinds of change and shift that people try in their writing are dreams, ghosts, and the future.

DREAMS

Real dreams are strange, full of meaning, full of images, sometimes funny, sometimes frightening. Made up dreams are hard to do.

Some of the dream pieces I read are stories with a 'dream' frame put round them. That's fair enough if it gets you started. It's a sort of nervousness: will this story stand up on its own?

This one does: it's about a car crash.

The waterway I talked of earlier was a canal,
I know because when I fell to earth,
I stood up.
Whether with momentum or the shock of the crash.
I fell backwards into the thing.
Sinking slowly, wondering what the hell of a mess
I'd got myself in,
and how the hell I was going to get me out,
shock must have set in
because I could see everything
and thought I was standing in the water.
In fact I was lying in it, drowning slowly.

Barry Warrener, from *Shock*

There's a lot more to come, and it's all as gripping and believable. I think Barry must have got stuck for an ending; but to my mind he didn't need this:

'A noise seemed to wake me.
I couldn't make it out . . .
Then it hit me what was being said:
'Get up, you lazy sod,
or are you going to stay in bed
all the rest of the day?'

If you write that kind of dream story, look at it again and see if you can chuck the frame away afterwards.

Real dreams can have their own kind of escape.

DREAMS

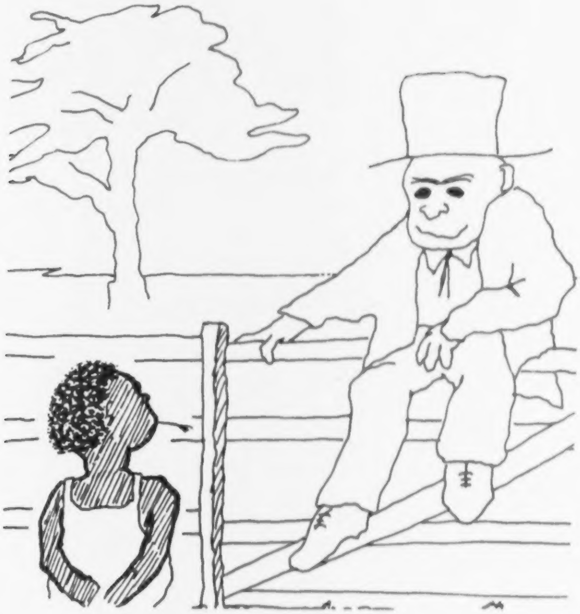
I heard about when people fly in their dreams. I thought how lovely it would be to fly in your dreams.

Then one night, out of the blue, I had a dream. It went like this. I was walking down the road and I wanted to fly so I started running, put my arms out in front of me, then went up a little bit, then dropped. I had another go. But I dropped again. I was determined to fly, so I got up, went back and started running faster and faster, then I put my arms out in front of me. Then suddenly I started rising up and up. I went up, just missing the shops. Then I flew down under the bridge of Hainault Station doing a couple of somersaults. The best thing is going straight up in the air then just dropping from the sky doing a couple more somersaults on the way. Don't ask me how I got down on the ground, but I know it is the best dream I ever had.'

Paul.

GHOSTS

Ghosts are deadly serious to some people.



PA BRUCE

by Alexander

This happened when I was about three or four years old and my mother and I were alone at home. The yard was on a hillside and it was flat grass, all smooth. And I was rolling down the hill. I was rolling down, then I would get up and run towards the house and roll down again. I was down at the gate and there was a road across and another gate over on the other side of the road with a swing gate about 8 ft. wide. As I got up I saw a man sitting on the gate on the other side of the road. I didn't know that it wasn't a man, a natural man. He had a white coat, white shirt, white pants and white hat. Everything white.

I started to speak. 'How do you do, Sir? . . . Good evening, Sir . . .' I kept speaking to him for several minutes. Then my mother, who had been busy in the house, said, 'Alec, who are you telling "howdy" to?' I said, 'There's a man sitting on the gate.' And right away, as I looked back, it wasn't a man, it was a crow. And my mother said, 'Run, come, Alex, it's Pa Bruce' – but she didn't see him – and as she said that, the crow flew away and flew underneath a breadfruit tree.

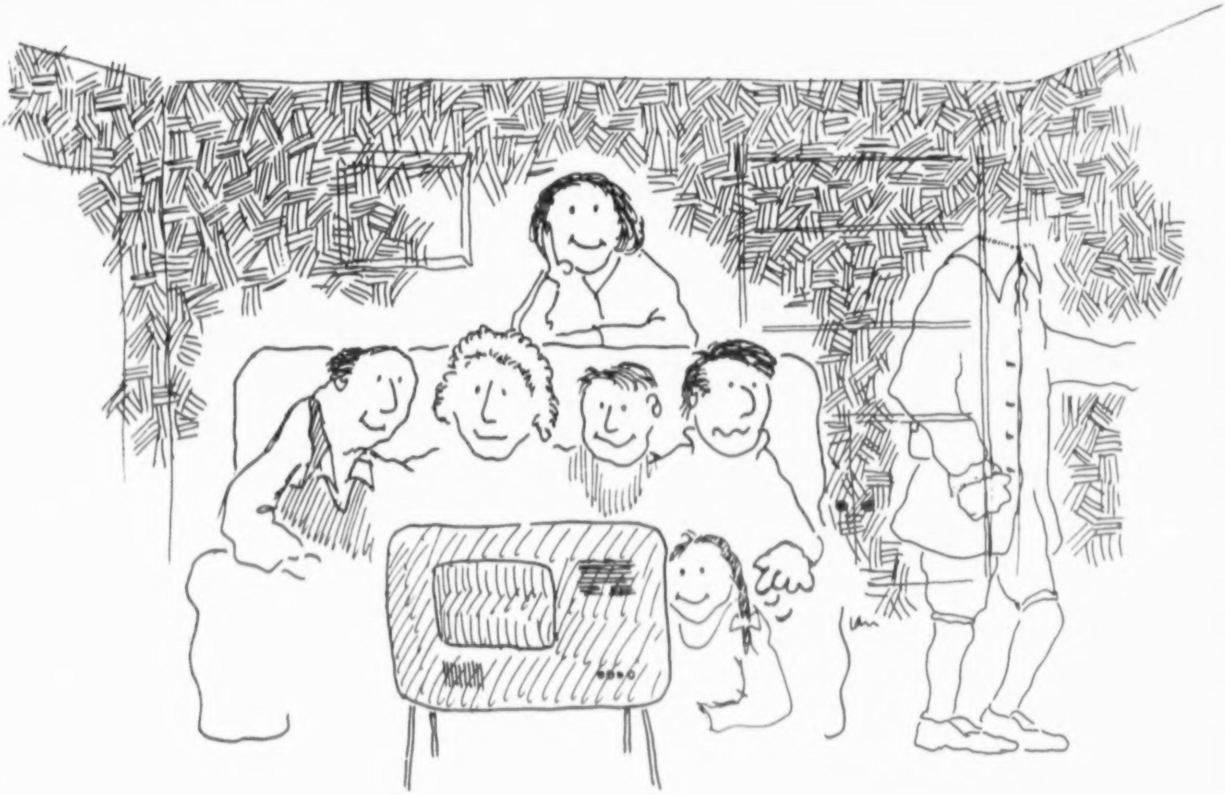
I ran towards my mother and as I reached her I fell on my face. I didn't know anything until I woke up about two o'clock in the night, and my aunt, my father, my granny and a cousin and other people, strangers, were there. I think they believed I would die and they were rubbing me with all kinds of things. I could smell onions and garlic and all sorts of things.

And they said if my mother had not called Pa Bruce's name he would have taken my life.

But I don't know about that.

It was only later I learned that Pa Bruce had died some time before and was buried near the breadfruit tree.

Other people will tell you ghost stories and swear they are true, but it's hard to tell if they seriously believe in ghosts or not.



JOHN'S TRUE SPOOK STORY

It was 12 o'clock at night, the late film had just come on the colour TV. Something compelled me to look around. I saw this headless figure coming through the wall, five other people saw the figure too, so it couldn't have been my imagination.

The figure, some bloke dating back to the Jacobite Rebellion, drifted through the opposite wall. This was the ghost John Radcliff, Earl of Derwent. The other ghosts were his brother and sister, Charles and Anna. We didn't take much notice of the figures, just carried on watching telly.

John Elliott, from *WFT* Year 7 no. 3

And, of course, people make them up.

Ghost stories give you a framework to write to. You know the sort of thing that should happen. You know you need suspense and surprises. People read them a lot, and watch them, so they are used to the rules and conventions of this kind of story.

But I'm still puzzled: not about the people who believe in ghosts, but about the people who don't. Is it still a way of saying something about life after death, even if we aren't sure there is one? Or is it just a scary story that we know isn't true, so we can enjoy being scared?

* What does the ghost story framework free you to say?

THE FUTURE

There are rules and conventions in writing about the future, too. One tradition is to use stories about the future to comment on what is happening now.

IN THE YEAR 2480

I am a chef in the year 2480 – my job is to press buttons as most of the food is in tablet form. I just sit and press buttons for two hours a day, that is if you are allowed to work as the population is about 790 million, and all the people must work. The government has made a law that no babies are to be born until the population goes down –if anyone is found pregnant the penalty is death. The government is thinking of making a law, that is if you are too old to work you are no use to society and therefore must be destroyed. My pay is £10,500 per week, my take-home pay is £6,000, my rent is £3,000, the newspaper which you must buy is £750 for a week. My home is 8ft. long by 5ft. wide; the bed folds into the wall; there is a table, a chair and a wardrobe. I am lucky to be on the top floor – I have a window. The flat I am in is 100 stories high – they have to be built like this to house everyone. In about two years time it will not be so crowded as they are nearly finished building on the moon, which will take half of the population.

Hobbies are not much fun because all you have to do is select your hobby on the computer and watch the video. My hobby is making jig-saws – I just sit and watch the computer doing it for me. My other hobby is walking, but as the country is overcrowded that is not possible. There is one way I can carry out my hobbies – that is to go to prison because the prisoners are sent to the moon to build houses which are inside a huge glass dome. There is plenty of room up there as there are only about 5 million prisoners.

The police move around easily as they have air-cars and air-bikes which run on compressed air. The only transport for people is the underground train. To travel from one city to another is very difficult as you need a special pass so the police can keep an eye on you. There are about 250 million policemen. Scientists have stopped the use of experiments on animals but they are experimenting on humans.

David Fishburn: from *WFT* Year 6 no. 2

What aspects of life now is David picking out? Would you pick out the same ones?

Another use of looking into the future is tied up with space travel and the idea of non-human life. If you write about *us* travelling *there*, you can say things about the way we behave by putting us in a new, experimental situation. If you write about *them* travelling *here*, you have the perfect change of viewpoint: everything that is familiar to us is strange to them.

VISITING TEAM

I don't think we will stay here long this visit.
The big field we landed on
turned out to be a football pitch.
The game is going to start
in about ten minutes.
As sure as chips are chips, that's micro-chips,
one of those big-footed human beings
will tread on our flying saucer.

They have not changed much
since we last visited,
which was two months ago our time,
two hundred years their time.
The races are still fighting one another,
most of each nation's wealth
is spent on arms and defence.
Two of Earth's nations have sent
one or two funny old spaceships
to an old burnt out place called the Moon.
We will visit them in about two weeks,
if they still exist.'

E.S.: from *WFT* year 7 no. 2

Some people feel this kind of fiction gives you most freedom for your imagination. But imagination can go thin if it hasn't any details to feed on. Ask the same questions about your 'future' as you would about describing something here and now. What can you smell, taste, hear, feel and see in your world? How do people (or creatures) talk to each other? How do they behave, how do they live together?

WHAT SETS YOUR MIND FREE?

I've looked at these three starters – dreams, ghosts, the future – because they obviously appeal to a lot of people. They are all ways of saying, 'The daily grind isn't all there is, ' or of saying, 'You can say true and interesting things without describing ordinary life'. Both of these statements are true; so if one of these starters gets you going, then go.

But there are also traps built in. Because these forms are used by a lot of people, they have built up some rules and conventions that you may find it hard to break. And they may not take you to what you want to say.

Dreams may carry with it, 'This isn't really serious'. It may be a cop-out on your own story.
Ghosts may carry with it, 'The dead are out to get us', or 'Death is too frightening to talk about straight'. Do you want to say this?
The future may carry with it, 'Machines are stronger than people', or 'All non-human creatures are enemies'. Do you want to say this?

If you don't, you'll have to work against the rules. It can be done: none of the pieces I have used has these messages. Rules can be a help if you're not sure of your own power to invent; but they can trap you. Just like rhymes can help you do the next line in a poem; but they can trap you into a word you didn't mean.

And it is possible for your imagination to take off on the sights and sounds and experiences of everyday life. You don't have to step into fantasy land to free your mind: imagination can be *in*-sight as well as long sight.

FOCUS

The four sections before this have been to open you out and get ideas stirring. This one is about getting down to it. It's a bag of tricks for getting started, or for focusing your mind within a bigger subject. They are borrowed, stolen and adapted; if you recognize an idea of your own, thanks for lending it.

For once, they are presented in a form that you can pinch out of the pack and say, 'That's what I'll do in class next week'. So they come out one or two to a page.

The section is called 'Focus' because that's one of the keys to good writing: concentrate your eye – or your mind's eye – on what you're talking about, like a well-focused photo; and put down what you see.

It ends with another piece of borrowed work: one way of organizing yourself for a larger piece of writing.

STARTING SMALL

I sometimes ask people to bring in something from home that has some significance for them, to talk and write about. It's surprising how much can come out of mother's old purse, or a champagne cork, or an old postcard.

If you can't bring it in, you can think about it. A piece of furniture – a first car – clothes . . . .

MY JACKET

The jacket is seven years old. The colour has faded and I have cut off the arms and am now putting badges on, mostly heavy metal groups.

The badges I have on my denim jacket are a symbol of myself and what I like and what tastes I have.

M.G. stands for a motor car symbol, and it stands for my name, Michael Greenwood. Abba is a group I used to like and never put it on anything. My Motorhead badges are all over. SAXON, JUDAS PRIEST, ACDC – the JUDAS PRIEST one is the biggest one on my back; it's on a razor blade.

They are a con if you think about it; you and me are advertising for the band, groups, or singer, and you have to buy them.

If you buy an Adidas sweat shirt you are paying for a well named company. The clothes have food and drink names on, e.g. Coca Cola and other well known companies, e.g. Kelloggs Corn Flakes, and some have cartoon characters, e.g. Spiderman and the Incredible Hulk.

Michael Greenwood.

FIVE SENSES

Your five senses are: hearing, seeing, smelling, touch, taste. If you want to focus on an experience, focus on the sounds, smells and so on that belong to it. It will pin your impressions down.

You've read about a group of us using this as a warm-up for writing in section A2. You can list what everyone recalls as they say it: it makes a sort of group poem. This was a different group.

MEMORIES

Seeing: Air-raid shelters in the street
The iron plugged in to the light
Looking into a coal fire
Coal-bunker in the back yard
Lumpy wallpaper with borders on
Brown varnished wood
Pop star pictures all over the bedroom wall

Hearing: Rag-and-bone man
Traffic: motor bikes
Ice-cream man with a handbell
Aeroplanes
Dogs down the entry
Radio: the Archers and Journey into Space
Squeaky balloons
Trains shunting
Water over the weir

Smell: Carbolic
Grandmother's sweet talc
Mink farm
Haymaking
Dog biscuit factory
Boneyard
Camphorated oil and Vick
Paraffin heater
Bleach
Petrol and oil
Electric smell from tram-cars

Tastes: Cod-liver oil and malt
Sherbert fountains and rainbow crystals
Braised liver and onions
A third of a pint of lukewarm milk
National Health orange juice
Hot milk in the head teacher's office
Hot water for stomach ache
Rhubarb
Grass stalks
Blood

Touch: Picking berries and squashing them
Running grass through your fingers
Tree bark
Moquette furniture
Seaweed and wet bathing suits
Wet sand
Stroking a monkey's tail
Hen's feet
Grazing your knees

You can just pick one memory, or one sense, to develop. It isn't only a useful approach to memories: it also works to focus on something everyday. Paul wrote about what he smells at work in a chemist's shop.

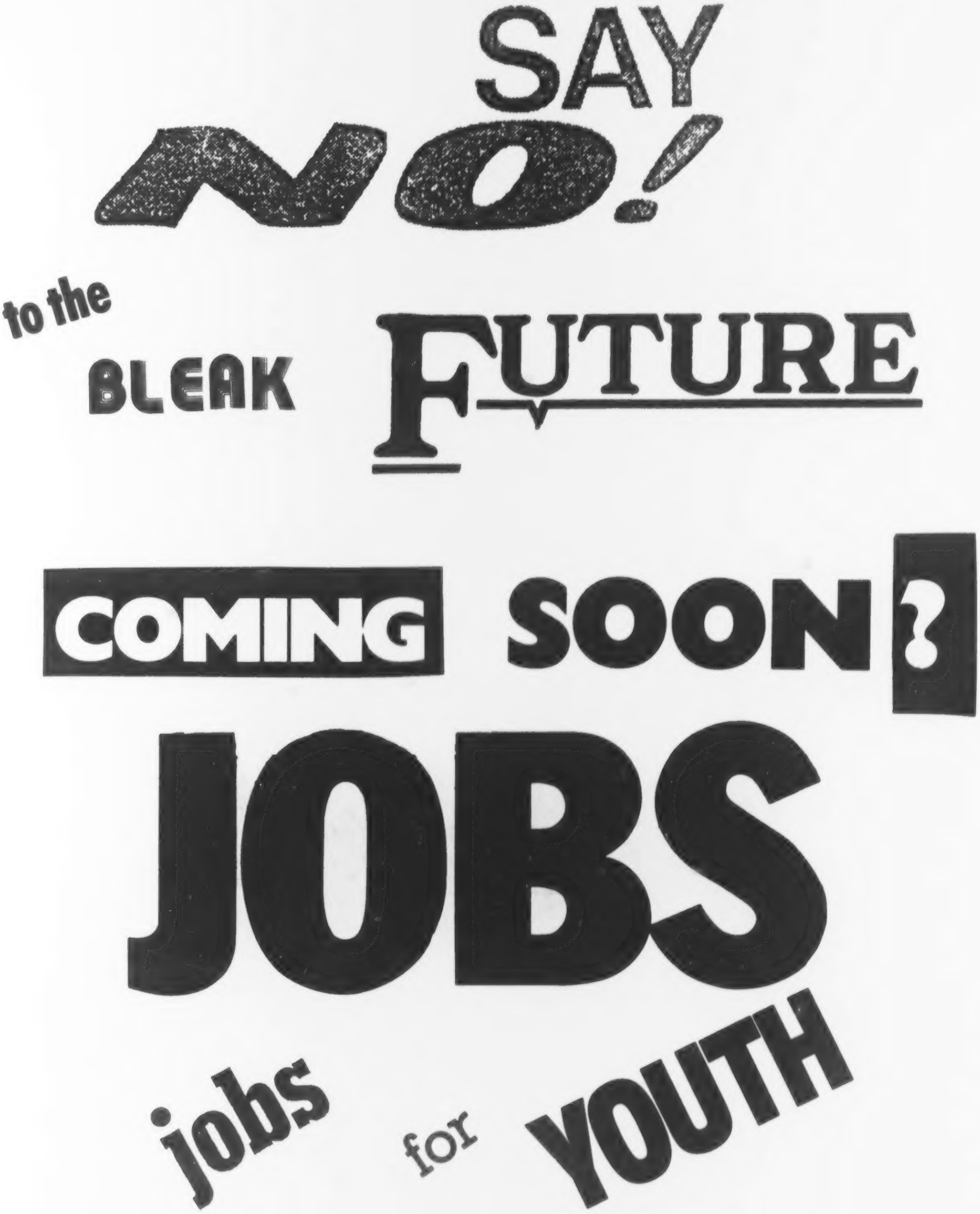
SMELLS
The smell of the brewery in the afternoon
In the morning – the bread being baked
The cafe upstairs cooking food all day
The smell of tramps going in the shop
The buses revving the engine – diesel
The smell of medicine being made up from prescriptions
When somebody drops the goods on the floor –
It depends what they drop
The paint in next door's shop when it's delivered.

Paul Ross

COLLAGE OR CUT AND STICK

Worth trying when you're really dried up – if your words won't come, borrow a few. All you need is some old newspapers and a pair of scissors.

You can also borrow pictures to illustrate your work, or to write captions for.


SAY
NO!
to the
BLEAK
FUTURE
COMING
SOON?
JOBS
jobs
for
YOUTH

STRONG WORDS

Go round the room and put in one strong word each – or two or three. You don't have to argue or agree about what 'strong' means – everyone's judgement counts.

Or else, ask one person to listen to a conversation and write down the strong words.

This is what we got from a talk about winter and the run-up to Christmas:

cold
social
muck
money
jealous
talk
depression
upset
dread
Christmas
escape

What then? Make your own collage, or no-sentence writing (see p. 6).

Take a word or two out to start you writing.

See how they fit together, or contrast with each other, and Take a word or two out to start you writing.

See how they fit together, or contrast with each other, and write about that.

COLOURS

Colours have strong associations with moods, memories, objects, meanings. Pick a colour and see what it says to you. This can be a way into something longer, or something for itself.

You can spice it up by thinking: what does this colour sound like or taste like? How would you explain colour to a blind person? I got these examples from Alison Fell's work with a group; there is more of their writing in *WFT* year 8 no. 2.

GREEN

Green to go
Green pool table – perfect
Green traffic lights
Green jumper jumping
Green flowers flying
Green shoes shiny
Sounds like a lead guitar
Green has a sour taste like lemon.

Mark Smith

YELLOW

Sounds like somebody yodelling
Feels soft
Very bright, sunny, hot
Tastes a bit bitter like lime
Smells like a yellow rose.

Janet Sheridan

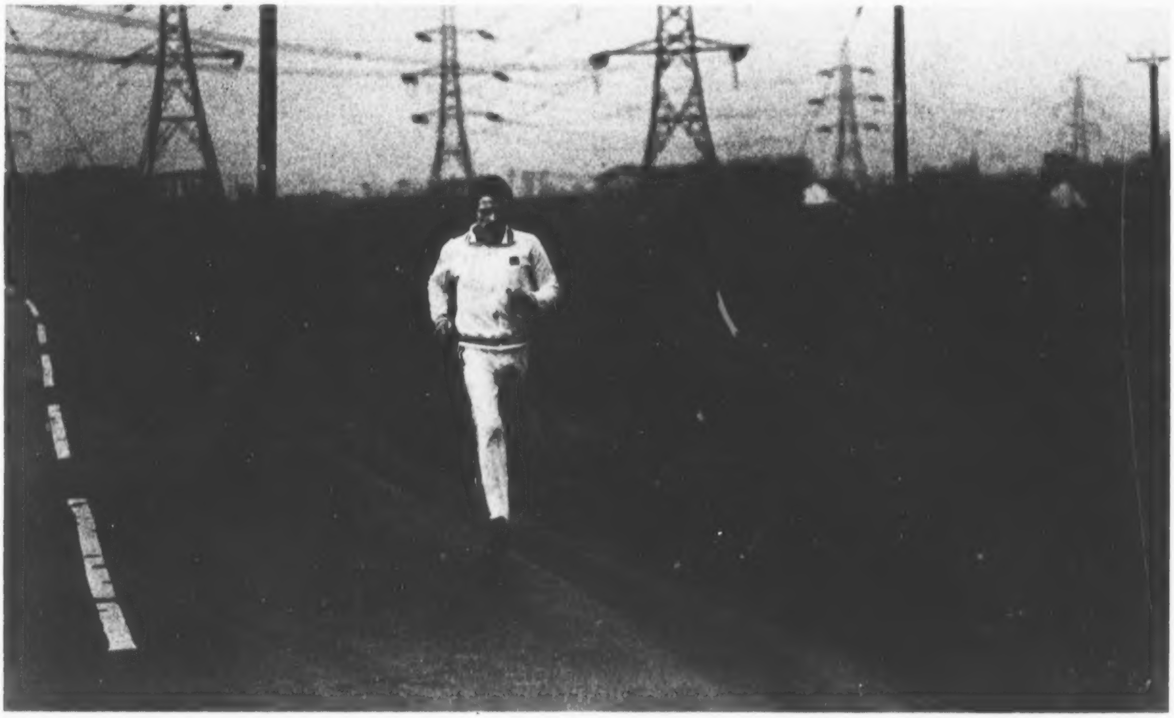
WITHOUT SENTENCES

We waste a lot of energy writing the joining words in sentences – the troublesome these's and where's. Try writing without them. Just put down phrases that say the important things, and let the joins take care of themselves.

Rosy-cheeked children
A square of carpet
Minds waiting
A fairytale world begins
Runny noses, coughs
Sighs
A hero in tragedy
Smiles, joy
3 o'clock
Minds wander
Thoughts of week-end
3.15
Prayers
Chairs on desks
Hands together
Eyes shut tight
Amen
Bell sounds.

Darryl Howe

It's particularly good if you are writing about something that has a rhythm to it, like work, or about what's going on in your mind.



MARATHON
The last eight miles
Pain then takes over
Every mile feels like two
Every step feels like three
All I want is more water
All I want is more strength/.1All I want is to sit down
But yet something tells me to carry on.

David Tolley

ACROSTICS

The title goes down the side; then you start each line with the next letter.

It's neat, leaves you enough freedom to fit in what you want to say, gives you a shape to follow, lets you know when to stop.

M um, where's my shoes?
Y ou haven't got my football boots out

F inish your breakfast
A in't you finished yet?
M um I found my boots,
I n the cupboard.
L ate again, it's the same every morning
Y ou wouldn't know what to do without me.

Georgina Smith

LISTS

When you don't quite know what you want to say about something, it's useful to list the parts of it. This can show you what you have to plan with. It may make sense, and have a sensible shape, without much more added to the list.

WHERE I AM COMING FROM

I come from gullies
In the sister country
From coconut trees
And sugar canes
I come from the tree tops
In the jungle of pimentoes
From oranges, tangerines
And sour-sop fruits
I come from dusty roads
In gravel infested tracks
From mango-walks
And chocolate plantations
I come from shop-fronts
Where salt fish is sold
From digging up yams
And planting corn
I come from Jamaica
Where freedom is a taste
Where dancing to reggae
Is the sweetest thing on earth.

Lynford Sweeney: from Commonword cards.

REPEAT LINES

If you want to pull something together so it's more like a poem, but you don't want to use rhyme, try using a line that repeats. It will need to be one with a point to it. All sorts of repetition are among the oldest and strongest ways of patterning words; you'll know examples in songs and rhymes and sayings

Why is grandad in that box Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
If he's only resting, why are they putting the lid on?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why are we going to church Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why has the priest got a frock on Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why have I got to shush Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why can't we bring Grandad home now Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why is Grandad dead Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why is he old Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why is he older than you Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why do I have to get to bed this minute Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why will you swing for me Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
Why have you smacked me again Mam?
Why, Mam, Why?
I am going up to bed now Mam
But Why, Mam, Why?

Colin Davenport

My friends say
I should be satisfied,
My friends say
I should feel lucky,
My friends say
I've got a chip on my shoulder,
My friends say
I shouldn't knock the system.
My friends are
Happy in their ignorance,
My friends are
Conditioned and contented,
My friends don't
Understand my anger,
My friends don't live in
Inner city squalor,
My friends are
Still my friends.

Sharon Dunham: from *Sub-animal yells*

ALPHABETS

Good to do as a group. Plenty of examples in *Write First Time*. Here's just a part of one: I've given you the end, because they had better luck with XYZ than most of us do. For followers of fashion, this was done by a group of young men in 1980.

MUSIC ALPHABET

U is for U Roy
V is for Vibration
W is for Watts that make all the power
X is for Xylophone – musical instrument
Y is for Youth whose problems are small
Z is for Zion's Gates are Open Wide.

Fitzroy, Donovan and Codrington: from *Write First Time* year 5 no.3.

ONE-LINERS

Also good for groups. Pick a simple sentence beginning: 'I wish . . .' or 'I can't stand . . .' or 'I'll never forget . . .'.
Write one or more sentences each, then cut and shuffle them till they have a shape. Here is part of one:

Wouldn't it be nice if I really got organized.
Wouldn't it be nice if the sun shone for a week on my street and we all sat outside and talked to each other.
Wouldn't it be nice if I could take the kids abroad for a holiday and have plenty of pocket money.
Wouldn't it be nice if everyone in the house would wash up after themselves.
Wouldn't it be nice if, having changed the sheets on the bed, I could just climb between them.
Wouldn't it be nice if I could just eat what I want.
Wouldn't it be nice if, having learned to swim, I could dive in the pool at the deep end.
Wouldn't it be nice to go water skiing.
Wouldn't it be nice just to close the door and go out.

(Need I say it was a group of women.)

FILLING IT OUT

I've only tried this once. We started with 'Welcome to the town of Swaffham', and everyone added bits of description. It came out like this:

'Welcome to the quiet, boring, historical, expensive, high, exposed, friendly, picturesque, Georgian, cold, wide streeted, small, industrious, busy, chaotic, noisy with traffic, lacking in opportunities, peaceful, unfriendly, retirement home, prosperous market town of Swaffham, once the home of footpads and pedlars, surrounded by beautiful woodland and the undulating terrain, watched over by the goddess Ceres and spoilt by the water tower!'

As you can see, there was more than one point of view.

Fun for the end of a session.

FREE WRITING

The easiest and the hardest of all: take whatever is at the front of your mind, or in front of your nose, and just start writing. Don't allow yourself any delay, and don't stop for anything. If you can't spell a word, write down any letters that will remind you what you want to put. Give yourself a set time – say ten minutes – and see what you come up with.

BORROW A FIRST LINE

Another way of jumping in the deep end. Get together a collection of good first lines from other people's work, or sentences you overhear on the bus, or any kind of opening that arouses interest. Put them on cards. To start on a stuck day, just cut the pack and take a card. You can make whatever rules you like about changing for another card, or about grouping them and picking a group first. Here are a few:

It was deep dark when I got out of bed.

I can't read and write, but I do know what's going on.

The story I'm going to tell you is about my grandfather, who died twice.

I wouldn't be young now, not if you paid me.

(Thanks to Robbie Carson and Dorothy Eyidah for two of those.)

FALSE STARTS

Both of these devices are for breaking the silence of the empty page. You need to do this even when you have more of a subject to get started on.

It's easier if you remember that the first words you write don't have to be the first words of the finished work. They maybe somewhere in the middle They may not turn up at all in your final draft – they may have been another bit of warming up. Or they may belong to a different piece that you can write later.

It's better to start in the middle than not start at all. Even if you're a perfectionist – one of those writers who hates crossing out, and throws away every page that doesn't come right – you may find you can relax a bit if you start to see false starts as a technique, not a mistake.

LONGER JOBS

The problem for keeping a longer piece of writing in focus is that you have to do it for each part and also for the whole thing. Here is one working method. Everyone could use it; and it turns the reading difficulties of some group members into a strength. They are the test of whether the words are clear or not

A humble technique

This is the way we do it:

To start with, each of us keeps a notebook in his pocket. Every time an idea comes up, we make a note of it. Each idea on a separate sheet, on one side of the page. Then one day we gather together all the sheets of paper and spread them on a big table. We look through them, one by one, to get rid of duplications. Next, we make up separate piles of the sheets that are related, and these will make up the chapters. Every chapter is sub-divided into small piles, and they will become paragraphs.

At this point we try to give a title to each paragraph. If we can't, it means either that the paragraph has no content or that too many things are squeezed into it. Some paragraphs disappear. Some are broken up.

While we name the paragraphs we discuss their logical order, until an outline is born. With the outline set, we reorganize all the piles to follow its pattern.

We take the first pile, spread the sheets on the table, and we find the sequence for them. And so we begin to put down a first draft of the text.

We duplicate that part so that we can each have a copy in front of us. Then scissors, paste and coloured pencils. We shuffle it all again. New sheets are added. We duplicate again.

A race begins now for all of us to find any word that can be crossed out, any excess adjectives, repetitions, lies, difficult words, over-long sentences, and any two concepts that are forced into one sentence.

We call in one outsider after another. We prefer it if they have not had too much schooling. We ask them to read aloud. And we watch to see if they have understood what we meant to say.

We accept their suggestions if they clarify the text. We reject any suggestions made in the name of caution.

Having done all this hard work and having followed these rules that anyone can use, we often come across an intellectual idiot who announces, 'This letter has a remarkably *personal* style'.

Letter to a teacher: by the school Barbiana. pp. 103-104.

I wish more books were written like that. I wish I were sure that I have followed those rules.

PHOTOGRAPHY

This section and the next one are about different media in which you can say things. They call on different skills, but you always need to think about what your meaning is and what the work says. This first one is about black and white photography. Many student groups have done this now. It isn't hard to get the equipment or to learn to use it –printing as well as taking photos. Making your own also helps you to question how you look at photos. We see so many every day, it's a good idea to ask yourself, 'What is this picture saying? Why is it like that?' They aren't bits of the real world – they are someone's view of the real world.

This is how one group worked at photography. There are plenty of other ways to go about it: you'll find your own ideas.

The Lee Centre in South London (part of Goldsmiths College), has a number of literacy groups meeting in the day and evening. In 1984 a Photography Project (funded by the GLC) was based at the Centre. The Photography worker, Arabella Plouviez, worked with one literacy group on a Thursday afternoon from April to June. They took photographs in the building and out in the street, and printed them in the Centre darkroom. For four afternoons they were joined by a literacy tutor, Jane Mace, to talk about the pictures they had made and get some of their ideas written down.

What follows is the introduction to the scrap-book they made of their work. (They wrote the introduction at the end of the project.) Then there are four pictures from the scrapbook, with comments from the group. At the end is a note on studying photography, which Jane wrote to get the talk going.

INTRODUCTION

This is a project about people's everyday work and lives. Women's work and men's work, as it is seen to be.

HOW THE PROJECT WAS STARTED

We went out with cameras to take some pictures
1. To learn how the camera worked
2. To take pictures of different types of work.
3. It was just a theme, people as we saw them.
Kids working through play, adults working by playing with children. 'Traditional' forms of work.
People shopping and shop keepers.
People being paid to work. People not being paid to work.

WHY DID WE TAKE THOSE PICTURES?

To show various forms of work. To show people working in the Lee Centre. To see the results.

WHEN WAS THIS DONE?

We spent two afternoons taking the pictures, and several afternoons printing them up.
Brenda: Printing, a bit complicated to begin with, but alright now.
Robert: Enjoyable, exciting. Bit tricky, I can see in the dark so it's easier.
Jimmy: Good fun.
Lebert: Good, when you know it properly.
Bob: Interesting, a bit difficult at first, especially focusing.

USING THE CAMERA

Brenda: Alright, a bit difficult. I want to do more, the numbers are a bit confusing.
Robert: Enjoyed it. It's different from the camera I've used before, it's smaller and more confusing.
Jimmy: I've used a camera a lot.
Lebert: I think it will be alright, I've only used a Polaroid before.
Bob: A bit overpowering, I'm nervous of all the dials.
Alvin: I want to get the hang of using a camera.

WRITING THE WORDS

Bob: Lively, witty, interesting. Makes it more enjoyable, tells you a bit more about the pictures.
Jimmy: You look at the photographs more.
Brenda: You see more than you thought was in the picture, when you were taking it.
Lebert and Bob: It was useful to do the writing, because people talked about the pictures they had taken.

Looking at the pictures sparked off all sorts of ideas and memories.

Brenda: A girl was looking to see if she had the money for the washing machine. The dog was enjoying a bit of fuss. The people on the right hand side were talking until we take the camera into the launderette. They stopped then.

Brenda: They didn't like their photo being taken. I am sure they were ashamed of their job.

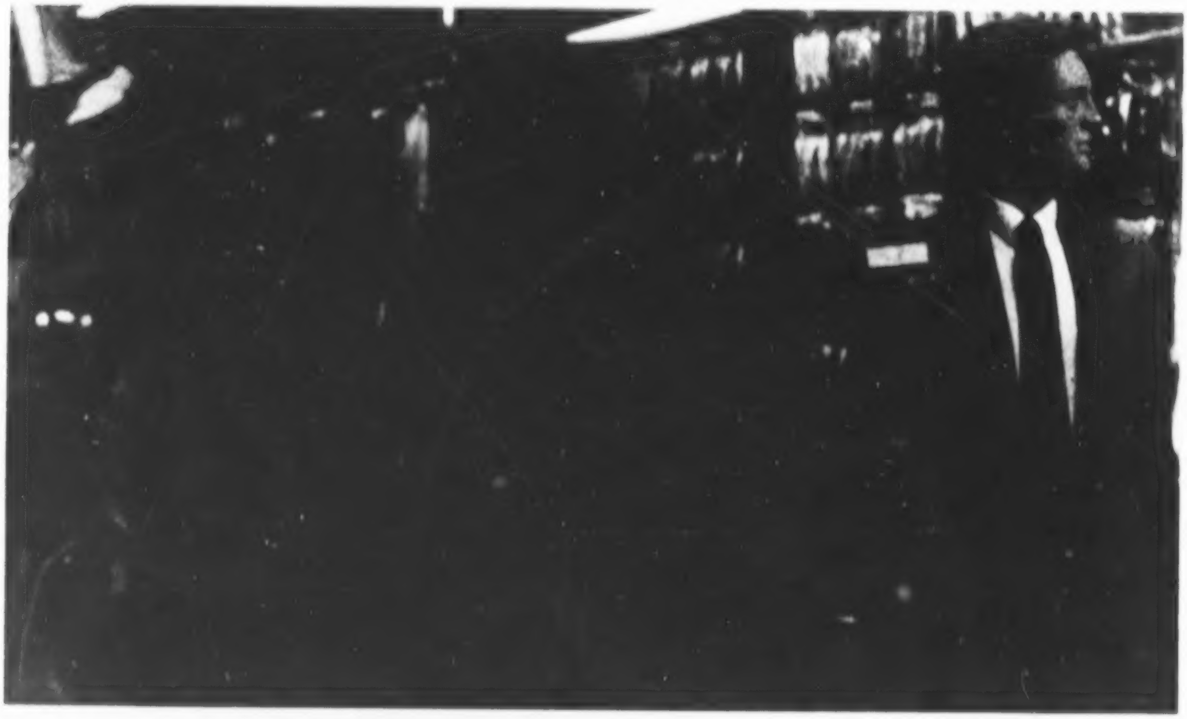
Bob: There's so much suspicion when people take photos. 'Who are they. Council? Government spies?' I remember when I was working as a messenger, some American tourists wanted to take a picture of me outside 10 Downing Street. I couldn't stop them, but I wasn't going to pose for them.

Jane: What does my face look like in this picture?

Arabella: Seen a ghost. Didn't want your photograph taken. Pulled a face. Disgusted!

Jane: I don't remember making that face when you were in the room.

Arabella: It appears like you've sat there for hours looking like that.



Roger: An unusual quiet. Which are the real people? Rows of shirts, trousers, and a row of jackets. On the left, a reflection of myself in the doorway. A poster above. And a bloke having a meal in a Wimpey bar. Girl at cash desk.

STUDYING PHOTOGRAPHY: one picture at a time.

Usually, when we look at a picture – in the street, or on paper – we don't know anything about the person who took the picture, or the person who is in the picture.

We don't know what they thought about, as the picture was being taken. We often don't even know their names.

Most of us don't know much about how the picture got produced, either.

But when *you* are the person who has made the picture, you see it with a different eye.

You can explain to someone else what it means to you.

You can do this, by saying what you know about these questions:

1. WHO TOOK THE PICTURE?
What did you see *before* the picture was taken?
What made you choose to take that one, at that moment?
What did you *hear* as you took it?
What were you thinking about, as you took it?

2. WHO IS IN THE PICTURE?
Do you know their names?
Did they say anything to you, before or after the camera clicked?
If they're with you, now, can they tell you what they thought about when the picture was taken?
Or what they think about how the picture shows them?

3. WHO'S LOOKING AT THE PICTURE?
If it's you, is it the picture you wanted to make when you pushed the camera button?
What do you see in the picture?
What does it make you think of?

4. HOW DO YOU MAKE A PICTURE?
What steps do you have to take, to turn the image on the film inside the camera into a photograph?
Is it hard?
How long does it take?

Talking and writing about this can help you think about the pictures you want to make next.

TAPE-SLIDE AND VIDEO

TAPE-SLIDE

This was written with the help of Robert Merry, who has been working on a Special Activities Project. He has been studying writing week-ends, reading evenings, short courses, trips and visits – anything different from ordinary one-to-one and group work. He wanted to report on these activities in a way that would reach students, and that would encourage people to try them out. He made a tape-slide.

A tape-slide is a set of colour slides that go with a sound tape. They are linked together by a simple piece of equipment that changes the slides in time with what's on the tape, so you get the right picture with the right sound.

It's half way between an exhibition of photos with writing, and a film or video with sound. It's more alive and instant than an exhibition, and in some ways easier to do than a video: you use more common equipment. You can mix in a wide variety of pictures and sound.

Robert's is about special activities in basic education. He wanted to show them as well as talk about them, and have comments on the tape from the people who did them. He shows it to students, tutors, training groups. It puts over a lot of information, and the feeling about it, in a short time. It shows that people doing these activities were enjoying themselves.

It's there to use even if he can't go with it, so the message doesn't depend on him being free, or on him doing a brilliant talk on a particular day. It's been worked out in advance. It's more interesting than listening to just one voice. And he can up-date it if things change: it's easy to change a slide, and not too hard to edit in a new bit of tape.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO IT?

A camera that takes 35mm colour slides. A cassette recorder that has good sound quality. Then, later, you need somewhere to mix the sound on to a final tape, and put the bleep on that changes the slides. You can get help with this from a Media Resources person at a college or adult centre, or from a Community Media group. (Or you may just know a sound freak.) It may mean travelling to where they are for a couple of sessions to make the tape. They may also be able to help you learn how to plan and produce a tape-slide. Some groups run week-end courses.

It doesn't cost a lot to do: the cost of processing the slides, and the final tape.

You may need to do some planning on paper, like which slides to use and in which order (don't pick too many), and which bits of tape should go with them. You may want to write a script to join together the interviews, music, and whatever else you have. But these are working notes – nobody else needs to see them.

What you present to other people doesn't depend on spelling, tidiness or writing. It puts itself across in a different medium. They don't have to read to take it in either. It can get people responding and arguing whether they can read or not.

WHAT COULD YOU USE IT FOR?

Robert and I thought of these ideas: there are plenty more.
* Advertising your classes: on open days, at the beginning of the year . . . .
* Introducing new students to what goes on.
* Training volunteers and tutors (from the students' point of view).
* Explaining the need for basic education to people whose support you need. Defending your scheme if it needs it.
* Looking at local conditions: housing, play opportunities for children, anything you want to make a fuss about.
* Local history. Use old photos, tape old people's memories.
* What Britain, or one particular bit of it, looked like when you first came here.

It's good for anything where you want to show people as well as tell them, and to bring in the voices of people who can't be there to speak for themselves. It's better for some things than others. Robert found that 'short courses on different subjects' didn't get across as well as, say, 'week-ends away' – because people didn't look as if they were doing anything different.

It's a way of communicating with groups of people. It's a public medium. Writing is more private.

If you've got something to say, if you think pictures would help, if you would find writing it all too hard or if it would be too boring written down – think about a tape-slide. Great to work on as a group.

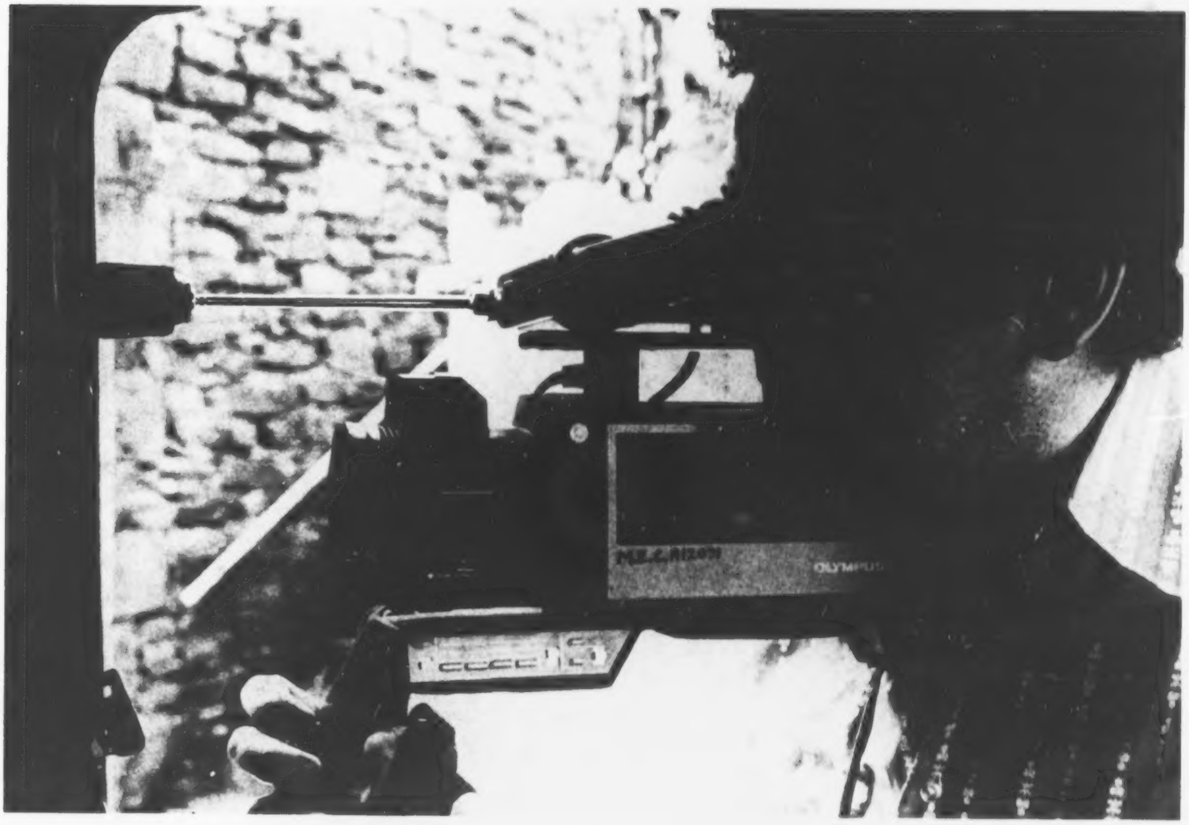
VIDEO

This section was written by Jim Devlin and John Glynn of the Gatehouse Project.

We usually start on the first session with a very brief introduction and introduce a simple format, like getting people to ask each other, 'Why do you come to this centre?' 'What is your journey like?' This is to give everybody a chance to try out the equipment. If somebody's head is missing or the camera is out of focus, it's not a great loss, and when played back it's very funny to see what has actually been recorded. After a good laugh everybody is usually more relaxed about the equipment.

This leads nicely into a discussion of what shall we do. The following sample formats have come out of these discussions from various groups.
1. Street interviews. Work out and write down questions to ask the public.
2. Short plays. Write a short sketch or play, made up or true.
3. Role play. Using real life situations, e.g. job interviewing to practise. This is a good confidence booster because you can say things you wouldn't say in your own character.
OR: using normal TV programme formats and develop them to suit the centre, or people taking famous characters and responding the way you would like them to.
4. Writing controversial sketches or films to be used as a stimulus for discussion or writing with other groups.
5. Publicity film for new students or new tutors, or as funds get harder to come by, a film to justify the project, centre or scheme.

In using these ideas, the writing of fiction or writing about somebody or something else is interpreted in a less fretting way. The video makes it easier to get away from yourself. And the basic ideas can be recorded for working on later.



To get any of the above ideas on film, obviously you can write down before you start the film all the dialogue and every little detail about movement, expressions, scenery, etc., but we've found the best way is to discuss with the group what we want to shoot, once the group feels confident with each other.

When you have agreed on an idea or ideas, draw up a simple sequence chart. Draw matchstick people in each screen shape, roughly how the finished scene should look, with a brief description of the action and the dialogue. It's a way of getting ideas down to be worked on later, maybe write a fuller dialogue after the first take, then the words come over more real.

THE EQUIPMENT AND WHERE TO GET IT

Most colleges, institutes, community centres and even video or media projects have the equipment, and very often a technician who will show you how to use the equipment, and sometimes will do more in-depth work on scripting, editing, and how TV is used, depending on the local area. It is pointless to go into any detail here on how to use the equipment, as there are a lot of models on the market and new ones coming all the time which are more simple to use than the last.

EDITING

Editing is the make or break of a film, especially if it is to be shown outside the group. It is very time consuming, because every shot and sometimes the dialogue has to be written down, so when you start linking the shots you don't have to view the entire film to find one scene. Editing isn't as creative as the writing and filming, but if done well it's the most satisfying. It is a good idea to talk it over with someone with some experience of editing.

There is also in-camera editing. If you are very careful with your filming and if you film in the right order without mistakes, you can make your film without the need of editing.

FOLLOW UP

The follow up work can be, 'Let's make this sketch into a better film', or a discussion on the issues raised, on the content and dialogue, or discussion on TV. Being involved with making something like a TV film gives a good insight into the way BBC and IBA work, and their bias and yours. Then you could make worksheets on the content, or decide to write something. We have always been amazed at the response to working with video. Maybe it's because a new door has been opened for people to direct their unrealized talents, or maybe they feel they are using this new technology for what they want in a way they want, for a change.

GOOD FILMING!

TAKING CHARGE

In the Introduction, I wrote about the approach to writing that underlies all the observations and suggestions that you have now read. I'm coming back to it, hoping that things will look different now that you have shared so much experience of what can be done, and how far students can join in discussion and description of the processes of writing. Like Robert Merry, in the piece I used in section C3, 'Learning', I think tutors can and should explain to students, as well as to themselves, why they work as they do.

I'll borrow a form of words from a colleague in California, Marlene Griffith. She says that the order of working on a piece of writing is 'Fluency, shape, correctness'.

FLUENCY
means flow. Words flow like water; it's an image we use all the time for talk. Writing often doesn't: it bogs down, freezes, is only a trickle where the talk was a flood. The first job is to free the flow.

One vital way to do that is to keep the talk there, to move to and fro between talk and writing. As you have read, most students who bring more talk into the class think it's anything but a waste of time. Another way is to take away the fear of mistakes. Student after student tells us: until you can relax and take risks, you can't move. Tutors can share this experience with students when they first come to learn, so that students can see and agree a way of working that is based on getting it out first and correcting it later.

Students also need to see and agree why tutors sometimes take the pen back themselves, or ask a more experienced student to do so, or use a tape recorder, to catch the flow. It's simple enough: sometimes we need to do that to make sure that a whole thought gets down, and not just traces of it, when the thought moves faster than the pen. It's a different process, for a different reason, from carrying on struggling by yourself.

Above all, fluency comes with practice and confidence. Aim to write a lot. The days when we measured our school work only by how many pages we covered were sad days; but building up a flow is a first condition, and without it nothing else can happen.

SHAPE

comes next. We can draw up rules for shape, and we can get experience of shapes that have proved useful; but what decides shape is what we have to say. Ideas have a shape in your head before they have a shape on the page: the hard job is to make the two match as nearly as possible. We shape a piece of writing by reading it as a draft, seeing what its point or points are, and by sorting out, adding and taking away till the points stand out as clearly as we can make them.

Some shapes you know you will have to use, and we can plan together to practise them. A clear order of events in a story; arguments for and against, or comparing this with that; working out how things are connected, and whether one is the cause of another; giving evidence for what you think – all these are things we will have to do in writing if we use it a lot. But they are best practised when you want to communicate meaning, not as exercises on their own; and they are needed from day to day, not only when you write for study. You can bring into the classroom real messages that you want to take to real readers, and see if they get across or not. Then you'll know that you're learning.

CORRECTNESS

comes last, but not because it's not important. Wrong spelling, missing punctuation, even bad handwriting – many people have suffered from a reader's judgement of these things, failed to be taken seriously or even missed getting a job because of them. They are not signs that everything about a piece of writing is out of order, and they certainly don't mean the writer can't think straight. But many people think they do; and perhaps some writers themselves can't see past the messy surface and recognize that they are making sense underneath. So no teacher would want you to stop bothering about these features of writing. If they block communication so badly, then of course they matter.

But you can only correct something that's there. It's a polishing skill, not a composing skill. And to do it, we have to detach ourselves from what we mean in a curious way; we have to have finished with composing before we are free to correct. It's much easier to see mistakes in someone else's work. If we re-read our own, we often re-run the story or argument, the 'meaning' train of thought, and can't get free to see errors of transcription.

There are ways round this. Read from the bottom up for spellings. Read each other's work. We can test our knowledge of correctness just as easily on someone else's writing. As we gain experience, we do learn to be the reader of our own work, both for shape and for correctness, but to start with, we may need to share or change roles.

For experienced writers, these three processes – fluency, shape, correctness – are no longer separate stages. They overlap, instead of coming one after another. A skilled writer's mind moves all the time from meaning to correctness, and from large scale organization to the next word. Because this is so, it's easy for her to forget how hard it is for the inexperienced writer to do it all at once. If you can describe all the things an experienced writer does, you can decide how to break them up into stages.

But this will only make for good learning if the students understand what these stages are, and why it may be better to keep to this order of work. If that is clear between tutor and student, they can each suggest which kind of work on writing is appropriate at any particular time. Some of the writing you do is an exercise, some is a draft, some is finished work. Sometimes it's a classroom experiment, or a bit of fooling around, sometimes it's from the heart, sometimes it's a real message with a real reader. If you and your tutors aren't sure which is which, you won't be able to choose whether fluency, or shape, or correctness, or all three, ought to be the main concern of the day. It may also not be clear why the tutor sometimes writes for you, sometimes writes herself while you're writing, and sometimes pushes you to try on your own; or why a tutor says, 'Great!' to something that still looks like a mess to you. If students and tutors both understand and have words for what they are doing, it will make more sense to both of them and students can really have choices.

One way in which students can take control is by keeping their own record of their learning: a form of writing in which they can explore and work out their own ideas, ask questions, have second thoughts, and make demands of a tutor. Some people call it a learning log. It's a form of writing in which correctness doesn't matter much but pushing for the right meaning matters a lot. What did we do today? What did I get out of it? What didn't I get time, or find the words, to ask about? What's the next step? It's hard, asking yourself these questions, and it may not make sense to do it after every session. But if 'students taking control of learning' is to be real, then students need a space to work out what they are and are not getting out of the work they are invited to do. I'll end with a quotation from a learning log, written on the *Write First Time* Summer School. Its positive note seems right as a last word.

> Tuesday.
> 10/7/84
>
> I have found it very helpful to-day. As with the help of our tutor I have been able to start laying out the writing I have brought with me. She has shown me a compleatly diffrant aspect to the way I had been trying and gave up when I was at home. It is the first day for a very long time, that I can see by my work I am getting somewhere with my writing. I still want a great deal of help. As I am not shore that what I have writen to-night, will fit in with the work I have already done. It seems to be a much diffrent apmosphear here, very quirte and very friendly and we can sit and discuss with our new friends what we are doing in our classes. It makes a great diffrence when we can compare notes, we may not be doing the same writing, but even if we hear a few words from someone elses paper, it may enable us to fit a simeler bit in our work, That kind of thing acts both ways, what we learn from someone els, they might learn something from us.

HOW TO USE THIS SECTION

Books that are referred to or quoted in the other sections are listed here, in the order they turn up. Organizations mentioned are listed in the same way.

I have also listed some suggestions for looking further into some subjects. These come at the end of the list for that section.

Even if books are out of print, I have put them in the list. They may be in libraries. o/p means out of print.

I have not listed all the references to Write First Time. We have back numbers, though we have no-one now to deal with selling them. Please write c/o Gatehouse, St Luke's, Sawley Road, Manchester M10 8DB. But don't expect a quick reply.

INTRODUCTION

Composition and Transcription:
Writing and the writer. Frank Smith. 1982. Heinemann Education.
History of Write First Time:
'Thoughts on to paper: publications from adult literacy centres 1974-78.' Susan Shrapnel. 1979. *in Adult Education.*
'Life ain't all daffodils: a portrait of Write First Time.' Annabel Hemstedt, Juliet McCaffery and Ursula Rohde. *in South-East Arts Review,* Winter 1981-2. South East Arts, 9-10 Crescent Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 2LU.
The development of writing abilities (11-18). Britton et al. 1975. Macmillan Education.

THE PROCESS OF WRITING

A1 *Our lives: working women.* Eden Grove Women's Writing Group. 1984. Elfrida Rathbone Committee, 34 Islington Park Street, London N.1.

A5 *Learning by teaching.* Donald M. Murray. 1982. Boynton/Cook, USA.

A6 *Who feels it, knows it.* Various authors. 1980. Gatehouse Books, St. Luke's, Sawley Road, Miles Platting, Manchester M10 9DB.

A7 *Use you head.* Tony Buzan. Revised 1982. BBC.
From wages to Windscale: worksheets and how we have used them. Friends Centre, Brighton. 1980. ALBSU, Kingsbourne House, 229-231 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DA.
See also: *Mapping the writing journey.* Marilyn Hanf Buckley and Owen Boyle. 1981. Bay Area Writing Project, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA.

A8 *Not written off:* magazine from Calderdale Basic education students. 1983 on. c/o Horton House, Horton Street, Halifax HX1 1PU.

A9 *Working away.* James Lloyd. 1984. Beauchamp Lodge Adult Literacy Scheme, 2 Warwick Crescent, London W2 6NE.
ALBSU Newsletter, Spring 1984.
See also *Caribbean English and Adult Literacy.* Roxy Harris, 1979. ALBSU; and other suggestions for further reading under section B1.

A12 National Students' Association for Basic Education: c/o Kathy Turner, 18 Rake Hey Close, Moreton, Wirral, Merseyside L46 6EW.
Where do we go from here? Adult lives without literacy. 1983. Gatehouse Books, St Luke's, Sawley Road, Miles Platting, Manchester M10 9DB.

A13 *Because.* Linda Monaghan. 1983. Centre for Language and Literacy Skills, Bolton Royd Centre, Manningham Lane, Bradford 8, West Yorkshire.
Our lives: working women. Eden Grove Women's Writing Group. See under A1.

DISCUSSIONS

B1 YOU DO ENGLISH EVERY DAY.
This section really needs a long booklist with proper notes. I can only suggest some starting points.
Material to look at with students:

a. *Investigating our language.* John Richmond and Helen Savva. 1983. Edward Arnold.
A course book for 4th and 5th year school students: would adapt well.
The languages book. Mike Raleigh. 1981. ILEA English Centre, Sutherland Street, London SW1.
Less coherent, some humorous approaches, a very weak page on adult literacy.
b. For dialect variety:
The muvver tongue. Robert Barltrop and Jim Wolveridge. 1980. Journeyman Press.
Any local book like *Learn yerself Scouse,* or *Sheffieldish: a beginner's phrase-book.*
(What attitudes do these books put over?)
Record, *'Cockney translation'*, by Smiley Culture. Fashion Records/Polydor POSPX 704.
c. Student writing:
There is plenty of work printed in non-standard syntax and vocabulary but standard spelling. Here are a few not referred to anywhere else in the pack.
Never in a loving way. Josie Byrnes, 1978, Gatehouse. (Manchester)
The good old bad old days. Lil Smith. 1975. Centerprise o/p. (London.)
Milk River. 1979, and *Captain Blackbeard's Beef Creole.* 1981. Peckham Publishing Project, 13 Peckham High Street, London SE15. (Caribbean.)
Write First Time: year 7 no. 3 *'Guess where I come from?'* by Kathy (Birmingham.)
Year 8 no. 2 throughout (Caribbean.)
Year 9 no. 1 *'Bella.'* (Tyneside.)

General books.
Ways with words. Shirley Brice Heath. 1983. Cambridge University Press.
Language and Learning. James Britton. 1970. Penguin. Particularly on the processes of learning language, language as 'participant and spectator', and language and thought.
Linguistics and the teacher. Ronald Carter and others. 1982. RKP.
The article by Arthur Brookes is the source of 'What the linguists say' in my section.
Foundations for teaching English as a second language. Muriel Saville-Troike. 1976. Prentice-Hall.
US based and ESL based, but still introduces useful material on acquiring language and on language and cultural identity.
Language and literacy: the sociolinguistics of reading and writing. Michael Stubbs. 1980. RKP.
Pays much more attention than most to written language. Good arguments to work on with students who think spelling should be reformed.
Readings on language, schools and classrooms. ed. Stubbs and Hillier. 1983. Methuen.
(Especially: *Introduction: Understanding language and language diversity.* Stubbs.
Standard and nonstandard dialects of English. Trudgill.
Kinds of English: spoken, written, literary Brazil.)
British Black English. David Sutcliffe. 1982. Blackwell. Good documentation of the language skill of speakers of more than one dialect, and of the changes that happen with migration.
Becoming our own experts. Talk Workshop Group. 1982. c/o Orchard School, Well Street, London E9.
Language and people. J.F. Wallwork. 1978. Heinemann Educational. A survey text for education students. Has a chapter on language and writing.

All these books will of course refer you on to much more. None of them is specifically focussed on adult learners.

B2 WHAT'S THE TUTOR DOING?

Student response groups. There is good North American work on this, including:
Using student response groups in the classroom. Mary K. Healy. 1980. Bay Area Writing Project, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, CA94720, U.S.A.
'Connecting ideas and experience'. Sam Turner. *in What's going on? Language/learning episodes in British and American classrooms.* Barr, D'Arcy and Healy. 1982. Heinemann Educational.
Small group talk. *From Communication to Curriculum.* Douglas Barnes. 1975. Penguin.
Reading evenings. Leaflet by Robert Merry. 1984. c/o Beauchamp Lodge Adult Literacy Scheme, 2 Warwick Crescent, London W2.
National Students' Association. See under A12.
Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. c/o Roger Mills, 43 Gelston Point, Burwell Close, London E1 2NR.
Workers' Educational Association: Look up your District office, or write to WEA, Temple House, 9 Upper Berkeley Street, London W1H 8BY.
See also: *Action and Words: sharing literacy skills in community groups* 1983. NFVLS/ALBSU.

THEMES AND BEGINNINGS

C1 SOMETHING ABOUT MY LIFE

Brenda's piece: from *The tutor and the writing student: a case study.* Jerry Herman. 1979. Bay Area Writing Project, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, CA94720, U.S.A.
Norma's piece: from *Memories are made of this.* Second Step group, Bowthorpe. 1983. Adult Education, Gladstone House, 28 St Giles Street, Norwich, Norfolk.
Going where the work is. Isaac Gordon. 1979. Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.
Getting started: a basic education pack for tutors/organizers working with women in informal learning groups. Shelagh Doonan, Margaret Marshall and Chris Aldred. 1982. WEA, 9 Upper Berkeley Street, London W1H 8BY.
'Dig where you stand', Sven Lindqvist. From *Oral history,* vol. 7 no. 2. Autumn 1979.
Maternity: letters from working women. ed. Margaret Llewellyn Davies. Re-issued 1978. Virago.
Every birth it comes different. Students at Hackney Reading Centre. 1980. Centerprise (see above).
Just my luck, and *Too late.* Frances Holden. 1981 and 1982. Gatehouse Books, St. Luke's, Sawley Road, Miles Platting, Manchester M10 9DB.
I got it right. Karen Smith. 1983.
Doing my flat up. Dalcy Edwards. 1983. Both from Centerprise (see above).
Learning from experience. Jane Mace. 1980. Broadcasting Support Services Fund, 252 Western Avenue, London W3 6XJ.
Young people's writing:
Not a bed of roses. various authors. 1981. Basic Skills Unit/COIC, COIC Sales Department, Freepost, Sheffield S1 4BR.
Back home. Ranjit Sumal. 1981. Commonplace Workshop, 28 Dorset Road, London W5.
Small accidents. Sabir Bandali. 197 . ILEA English Centre, Sutherland Place, London SW1.
I started work. Robert Merry. 1981. Basic Skills Unit/COIC (see above).
Our lives. Various authors. ILEA English Centre (see above).
Bonnie, Freda and Ann. 1983. ILEA English Centre (see above).
Keesings Contemporary Archives. This goes week by week. OK if you want to check, say what was happening when you were born. For other uses it may be too much information. There are other books of dates, e.g. *Chambers dictionary of dates,* 1983 (a sort of anniversaries list: anything significant that happened on 12 August any year); *Encyclopaedia of dates and events.* 1974. Hodder and Stoughton; *The People's Chronology'* 1979. Heinemann (US based, but a rich list: popular songs, food availability, human rights, crime, energy, tranpsort, from prehistory to the present).
On earth to make the numbers up. Evelyn Haythorne. 1981. E. Haythorne, 30 Chestnut Grove, Conisbrough, S. Yorkshire. DN12 2JE.
Pure running. Louise Shore. 1982. Centerprise (see above).

Hard times and easy terms. Bert Healey. 1980. QueenSpark Books, c/o 13 West Drive, Brighton, E. Sussex.

The tutor and the writing student. Jerry Herman. See above.

John's words: from *Working with words.* Jane Mace. 1979. Writers and Readers/Chameleon.

See also: *Making history.*

1. *The factory* 1983.
2. *Women* 1983 Television History Workshop, 42 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AJ.

Two very readable and practical pamphlets. Their methods go far beyond their particular subjects.

Discovering women's history. Deirdre Beddoe. 1983. Pandora.

Discovering your family history. Don Steel. 1980. BBC.

To build Jerusalem. John Gorman. 1980. Scorpio. Photos of working class life and struggle.

Black settlers in Britain 1555-1985. Nigel File and Chris Power. 1981. Heinemann Educational.

Staying power: Black people in Britain since 1504. Peter Fryer. 1984. Pluto.

How we lived then. Norman Longmate. 1977. Arrow Books. Ordinary lives in the second world war.

The oral history handbook. Stephen Humphries. 1984. Inter-Action.

This is not strongly recommended. It is written as if there is a wide gap between the people investigating and the people being investigated.

C2 FEELINGS

The Rainbow. D.H. Lawrence. Penguin.

Every birth it comes different. Hackney Reading Centre. 1980. Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.

Idanre. Wole Soyinka. 1967. Methurn.

Reign of terror. Various authors. 1984. CAVE, 4a Rectory Grove, London SW4.

Selected poems. Robert Burns. 1946. Penguin.

Some grit, some fire. Hackney Women Writers. 1984. Centerprise (see above).

Letter to a teacher, by the school of Barbiana. 1969. Translation: Random House Inc. 1970.

For Beauty Douglas: collected poems 1953-79. Adrian Mitchell. 1982. Allison and Busby.

Cartoon from: *Mercy, it's the revolution and I'm in my bathrobe.* Nicole Hollander. 1982. St. Martin's Press, New York.

Songs of experience. William Blake. 1789-94.

Where there's smoke. Hackney Writer's Workshop. 1983. Centerprise (see above).

Left in the dark. Eden Grove Women's Writing Group. 1982. o/p.

Nineteen eighty-three: a first trade union annual. 1983. Lancashire Association of Trades Councils, P.O. Box 71, Preston PR1 1DU. o/p.

C3 LEARNING

A licence to live. Ron Barnes. 1974. Centerprise. o/p

Hard times and easy terms. Bert Healey. See under section C1.

Some grit, some fire. Hackney Women Writers. 1984. Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.

Finding a language. Peter Medway. 1980. Writers and Readers/Chameleon.

Each and every one. 1980. Beauchamp Lodge Adult Literacy Scheme. o/p.

Where do we go from here? Adult lives without literacy. 1983. Gatehouse Books, St. Luke's, Sawley Road, Miles Platting, Manchester M10 9DB.

Listening ears: writing about education. Various authors. 1980. Blackfriars Settlement Literacy Scheme, 44-47 Nelson Square, London SE1 OQA

Where do we go from here? See above.

American dreams lost and found. Studs Terkel. 1982. Ballantine

Our lives: working women. Eden Grove Women's Writing Group. 1984. Elfrida Rathbone, 34 Islington Park Street, London N1

Left to write. Beauchamp Lodge Adult Literacy Scheme, 2 Warwick Crescent, London W2 6NE. Some back issues available.

Working Lives vol II. 1977. Centerprise (see above).

Achieving literacy. Margaret Meek and others. 1983. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Through the door. Isobel Bowie. 1982. Blackfriars Settlement Literacy Scheme, 44-47 Nelson Square, London SE1 OQA.

See also:

Starting points for school history:

East Bowling Schools. 1981. East Bowling History Workshop, c/o 75 Brompton Road, Bradford BD4 7JE

The times of our lives: growing up in the Southwark area 1900-1945. Peckham People's History. 1983. Peckham Publishing Project, 13 Peckham High Street, London SE15

Dutiful daughters. Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham. 1977. Penguin

Hooligans or rebels? Stephen Humphries. 1982. Blackwell.

Girls are powerful. ed. Susan Hemmings. 1982. Sheba. Some writing by young women in school now.

Discovering women's history. Deirdre Beddoe. 1983. Pandora. (chapter 3, *'The education of girls'*, and references.)

Making history 3: The school. 1985. Television History Centre, 42 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AJ (and references.)

Individual life stories include:

A ragged schooling. Robert Roberts. 1978. Fontana. (Salford.)

Ain't it grand? Jim Wolveridge. 1976. Stepney Books, 19 Tomlins Grove, London E3. (Stepney.)

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Starting points for adult literacy:

Working with words. Jane Mace. 1979. Writers and Readers/Chameleon.

Where do we go from here? Adult lives without literacy. See above.

Who needs literacy provision? Jane Jeffrey and Chris Maginn. 1979. Macmillan Education.

A right to read. 1974. British Association of Settlements.

On writing for study:

Improve your writing. Maureen Cooper. 1984. COIC/ Longmans.

Learning together: a study skills handbook. Judith Edwards. 1985. W.E.A. West Lancashire and Cheshire District, 7/8 Bluecoat Chambers, School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BX.
There is nothing yet that gives a history of reading or adult literacy teaching in ways that students can share. Teachers can dig material out of histories of adult education, working class culture and the spread of the written word, but there is very little on the recent past.

Links are made between literacy work and working-class culture in:
The republic of letters. ed. Morley and Worpole. 1982. Comedia.
A specialist book on literacy in prisons is:
Imprisoned tongues. Robert Roberts. Manchester University Press. o/p

C4 ESCAPES AND CHANGES.
Speaking out. Various authors. 1978. Gatehouse Books.
Not written off: see under A8.
Some grit, some fire. Hackney Women Writers. 1984. Centerprise.
No dawn in Poplar. THAP Writers' Group. 1981. THAP, 178 Whitechapel Road, London E1
Voices magazine has now stopped publication. Some back numbers are available from FWWCP c/o St Luke's, Sawley Road, Manchester M10 8DB.
Local writers' groups and their work: contact Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, c/o 43 Gelston Point, Burwell Close, London E1 2NR
Shock. Barry Warrener. 1981. Airedale Book Company, Bolton Royd, Manningham Lane, Bradford 8, West Yorkshire.
See also:
Images and understandings: picture sequences for writing and discussion. Ruth Lesirge and Stephen Rothenburg. 1984. National Extension College.
Wishes, lies and dreams: teaching children to write poetry. Kenneth Koch. 1970. Harper and Row.

C5 FOCUS
Where I am coming from. Lynford Sweeney. 1981. Commonword, 61 Bloom Street, Manchester M1 3LY
Sub-animal yells. Sharon Dunham. 1983. Centerprise.
Letter to a teacher, by the school of Barbiana. 1970. Random House.

EXTRAS

D2 Robert Merry's tape-slide is available for hire, c/o Beauchamp Lodge Adult Literacy Scheme, 2 Warwick Crescent, London W2 6NE

D4 *Writing for the inexperienced writer: fluency, shape, correctness*. Marlene Griffith. 1979. Bay Area Writing Project, University of California, Berkeley, California CA94720, USA.
Learning logs: see also
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'This guy really can write', Diane Cookston. in *What's going on?* Barr, D'Arcy and Healy. 1982. Heinmann Educational.

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Write — away from it all: a guide to writing events. 1983 ALBSU.
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Writing: an anthology. 1978. Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. c/o St Luke's, Sawley Road, Manchester M10 8DB.
Opening time: a writing resource pack. Gillian Frost and Chris Hoy. 1985. Gatehouse Books, St. Luke's Sawley Road, Miles Platting, Manchester M7 8DB
Tinker, Tailor ... the myth of cultural deprivation. ed. Keddie 1973. Penguin.
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Errors and expectations. Mina Shaughnessy. 1977. O.U.P.
How to suppress women's writing. Joanna Russ. 1983. The Women's Press.
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Literacy in theory and practice. Brian Street. 1985. Cambridge University Press.
In search of our mother's gardens. Alice Walker. 1984. The Women's Press.
Culture. Raymond Williams. 1980. Fontana.
Let loose. 1978. Write First Time. o/p
Local publishing and local culture: the work of the Centerprise publishing project 1972-1977. Ken Worpole. 1977. Centerprise. o/p. (An up-dated history is forthcoming.)